

AUTHENTIC REPORT
OF THE
DEBATE
IN THE
HOUSE OF COMMONS,
ON THE 6TH AND 7TH OF MAY, 1793,
ON
MR. GREY'S MOTION
FOR A
REFORM IN PARLIAMENT;

CONTAINING THE SPEECHES OF

Mr. Grey,
The Hon. R. B. Jenkinson,
Mr. Powys,
Mr. Windham,
The Hon. Thomas Erskine,
Mr. Chancellor Pitt,
Mr. Stanley,
Mr. Buxton,
Mr. Duncombe,

Sir William Young,
Sir William Milner,
Mr. Francis,
The Earl of Mornington,
Mr. Whitbread, jun.
Mr. Anstruther,
Mr. Sheridan,
Mr. Adam, and
Mr. Fox.

TO WHICH IS ADDED,
A CORRECT COPY OF THE PETITION
OF THE
FRIENDS OF THE PEOPLE.

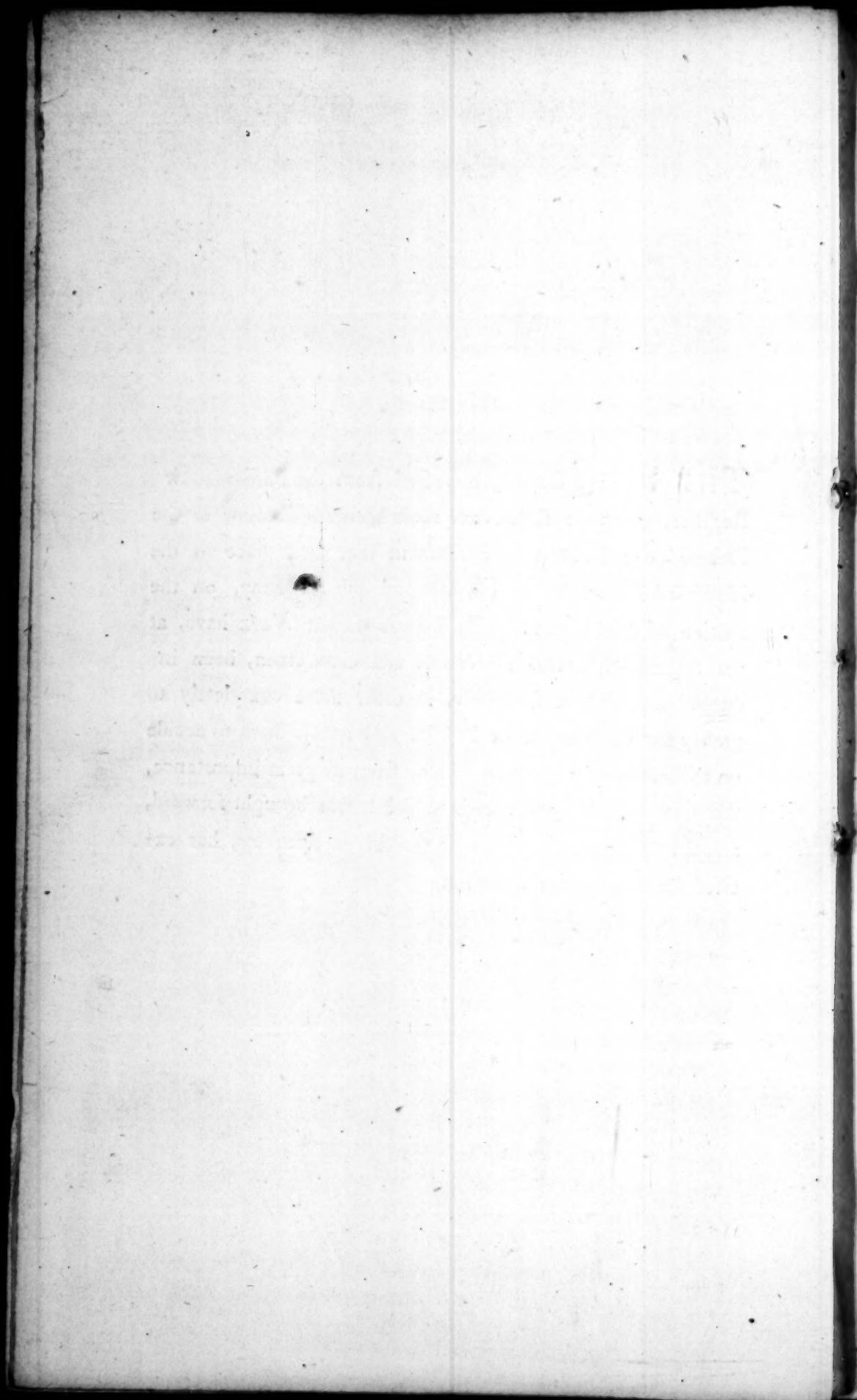
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1793.

157-67

THE following Report, extracted from the Parliamentary Register, gives the fullest and most accurate account of the Debate on a Reform in Parliament that took place in the House of Commons on the 6th and 7th of May, on the motion of Mr. GREY. The Editors of that Work have, at the request of several Noblemen and Gentlemen, been induced to publish it separately, in order more completely to gratify the curiosity of the Public, and enable them to decide on the merits of a question which, from its great importance, the particular circumstances in which it was brought forward, and the distinguished talents of the several Speakers, has excited the most general attention.



HOUSE OF COMMONS.

MONDAY, *May 6, 1793.*

TWENTY-THREE petitions were presented, praying for a Parliamentary Reform.

Mr. GREY then rose, and presented a petition, bearing to be the petition of certain persons whose names were thereunto subscribed, which was brought up and read by the clerk. The petition was of such length, that the reading of it took up nearly half an hour. It stated, with great propriety and distinctness, the defects which at present exist in the representation of the People in Parliament. It took notice of the division of the representation, or the proportions in which the different countries contribute to the total number of the representatives; shewing, under that head, the absurd disproportion which takes place in a variety of instances, insomuch, that the county of Cornwall alone sends more Members to Parliament than the counties of York, Rutland, and Middlesex, put together, &c. It proceeded to take notice of the distribution of the elective franchise, or the proportional number by which the different representatives are elected; stating, under that head, that a majority of the whole House of Commons is elected by less than 15,000 persons, or, in other words, by the two-hundredth part of the people to be represented, supposing that they consist only of three millions of adults, &c. It went on to take notice of the right of voting, or the various restrictions and limitations under which the privilege of a vote for the choice of a representative is bestowed; stating the great evils and inequalities that prevail in that respect. It afterwards took notice of the qualifications to be possessed by candidates and those elected; and then considered the evils arising from the length of the duration of Parliaments. It went on then to detail the mode in which elections are conducted and decided; and, under that head, shewing the evils arising from the length of time to which polls are protracted, from the influence of corporations, by the powers entrusted to returning officers, and from the appeal to the House of Commons, under the operations of the acts 10th, 11th,

25th, and 28th of Geo. III., as far as the same relate to expence and delay. The petition proceeded to take notice of the mischief resulting from the defects and abuses which it had previously pointed out, particularly by the system of private patronage and the influence possessed by Peers and wealthy Commoners in the nomination of what are called the representatives of the people; shewing, under this head, that, by the patronage and influence of seventy-one Peers and ninety-one Commoners, the return of no fewer than three hundred and six Members of that House was procured, which considerably exceeded a majority of the House. The petition dwelt, at considerable length, upon all the points already mentioned, and detailed a variety of other abuses, all which the petitioners offered to substantiate by proof; and it concluded by stating the great necessity there was for the application of an immediate remedy, and the high importance of such a measure; and prayed the House to take the matter into their serious consideration, and to apply such remedy and redress to the evils complained of as should appear proper.

After the petition had been read,

Mr. BURKE expressed his wish to know from whence the petition came which had just been read, as the place of residence of the petitioners was not mentioned.

The names of the petitioners was then read by the clerk; after which,

Mr. GREY rose, and said, it was certainly not uncommon that petitions should be presented to that House from persons not describing their place of abode, or assuming any other description than that of the persons whose names were subscribed to the petition: if, however, it would afford any satisfaction to the right honourable gentleman (Mr. Burke), he had no objection whatever to state, that all the subscribers reside either in London, or near it, and that the petition had been drawn up and signed there. On the very important subject which it respected, he was very apt to believe, that, whatever opinions gentlemen might entertain, either with respect to a reform in the representation of the people, or as to the time which might be thought proper for bringing it about, it must be considered by all parties as a matter of much importance, to have laid before them such an accurate, full, and precise detail of all the

facts connected with the subject, by those who are ready and able to prove the facts which they have asserted in their petition; it would also have the effect to shorten very much what he would have to say, and to render it unnecessary for him to trouble the House at any great length. He was aware of the difficulties he had to encounter: in bringing forward this business, he was aware how ungracious it would be for that House to shew that they are not the real representatives of the people: he was aware that the question had been formerly agitated, on different occasions, by great and able characters, who have deserted the cause, from despair of success; and he was aware that he must necessarily go into what may, perhaps, be supposed trite and worn-out arguments. From recent circumstances which had occurred, since he last brought the subject before the House, he had an additional claim to candour, from the extent to which the prejudices against all reform and innovation had been thereby increased. It was by no means his intention to go into any of the transactions of the period when he made his original motion on this subject, or to carry any idea along with him of what might possibly lead to personal resentment. He came forward, on the present occasion, actuated solely by a sense of duty, to make a serious and important motion, which, he was ready fairly to admit, involved no less a consideration than a fundamental change of the Government. He felt, in the strongest manner, how very formidable an adversary he had to encounter in the right honourable gentleman opposite to him (Mr. Pitt); formidable from his talents—formidable from the influence of his situation—but still more formidable from having been once friendly to the cause of reform, and becoming its determined opponent, drawing off others from its standard. With that right honourable gentleman he never would condescend to bargain, nor should he endeavour to conciliate his favour by any mode of compliment: he had never disguised the objections he had to the way in which he had come into power, and to the whole system of his government since. In the course of the last discussion on the present subject, the right honourable gentleman seemed to hint something of general objections to reform; but he well knew that the chief difficulty to be encountered, would be the argument as to the danger of the times. This, indeed, is a never-failing arg-

gument, equally in times of prosperity and adversity, in times of war and of peace. If our situation happens to be prosperous, it is then asked, whether we can be more than happy, or more than free? In the season of adversity, on the other hand, all reform or innovation is deprecated, from the pretended risk of increasing the evil and pressure of our situation. From all this it would appear, that the time for reform never yet had come, and never could come. By arguments such as these had reform been hitherto combated; and by the like he believed it ever would be attacked, until some dreadful convulsion should take place, which might threaten even the constitution itself with annihilation. Many had been the unsuccessful attempts to bring about a reform. At different times the great question of reform has been brought forward; but a proper time has never yet been found for it. In 1733, a motion was made in that House, by Mr. Bromley, for a repeal of the septennial act, and that motion was seconded in a very able speech by Sir William Wyndham. At that time the proposition was met, and successfully resisted, upon the pretence of danger arising from Papists and Jacobites plotting against the State and the Constitution. In 1745, another attempt was made; and that was the only occasion on which the pretence of danger was not made use of, although the country was then in a state of war and disturbance; but the success of the attempt was just the same as of the former one. Again, he said, the business came to be agitated in the year 1758; then also the motion was rejected. The right honourable gentleman (Mr. Pitt) had himself brought forward the subject three different times, in 1782, in 1783, and lastly in 1785, when he was Minister. The same objection with respect to the time was then made, and combated by the right honourable gentleman strongly and powerfully in argument, but without effect; and he had no doubt it would continue to be made successfully till the people resolve for themselves that there shall be a proper time. But while we are for ever met by this argument against any enlargement of popular rights, the encroachments of prerogative are overlooked, and no danger is apprehended from the passing an Alien bill, a Traitorous Correspondence bill, &c. It was, no doubt, true, that, in troublesome times, it might, perhaps, be necessary to delegate a larger portion of

power to the executive Government ; but why should innovations in favour of prerogative, be watched with less jealousy, than innovations in favour of the popular part of the constitution ? The business of reform appeared to have slept from 1785 to 1790, when it was again brought forward by Mr. Flood : at that time, the internal convulsion in France had but just begun ; and it was then asked, whether we would think of repairing our house in the hurricane season ? But he would, no doubt, be told, that the danger is now greater than ever this country experienced, by many degrees ; for the dangers talked of, at other times, are held to be all of no account, when compared with the danger of what are called French principles : if, however, there was ever any danger to this country from the propagation of French principles, or from the increased dominion of France, that danger unquestionably is completely at an end ; for it was impossible that any set of men, who had not actually lost their senses, should ever propose the French revolution as a model for imitation ; no argument, therefore, drawn from the situation of France, could apply to the kind of reform which it was the wish of those with whom he acted to introduce.

It had been said last year by the right honourable gentleman, that this country had just recovered from the calamities of the American war, and that it would be imprudent to risk by innovation the growing prosperity of the country. Now the case was unhappily most woefully reversed ; besides being involved in a most ruinous war, the whole commercial credit of the nation is shaken, and we have sunk from this zenith of our prosperity into the most necessitous and distressed situation ; witness the bill with respect to commercial credit, which that House had just passed ; witness the daily numerous bankruptcies. In this calamitous state with respect to credit at home and war abroad, nothing could tend so much, in all probability, to deliver the country from these dreadful evils, as to have a pure and uncorrupted House of Commons emanating freely and fairly from the people. Had a reform in the representation of the people taken place upon the end of the war and conclusion of the peace in 1763, this country had, in all likelihood, escaped the American war :—if it had taken place last year, it would probably have saved us from our present distresses.

He and his friends, he said, had published, last year, their opinions upon this subject, and credit would some time or other be done them for it. At that time, this country was at peace; Europe was distracted; had the House of Commons been a free and fair representation of the people, these advantages would, most probably, have been improved and secured. At present it is said that principles have been held, supported by arguments equally dangerous to the Constitution and to order; but how can these be so well met as by amending the errors of the Constitution? With these views he had given notice of the motion which he now brought forward. However unwilling he was to put this case upon the weight of authority; yet at a time when it has become customary to charge with bad views all those who talk of any species of alteration, he thought it right to state it had the support of very great and high authorities. It had been supported by Mr. Locke, by Mr. Justice Blackstone, by the late Sir George Saville, by the Earl of Chatham, and by the present Master of the Rolls, the present Lord Chief Baron, and the present Lord Chief Justice of the King's Bench. It had been supported by the right honourable gentleman (Mr. Pitt) himself, and by the Duke of Richmond, and by an authority still greater than these, viz. by a speech of His Majesty from the throne. On looking into the Journals of the 24th of May, 1784, he found a motion made, that the King's speech should be read, wherein His Majesty says, that he would be always desirous to concur with his Parliament in supporting and maintaining, in their just balance, the rights of every branch of the Legislature.— If he did not think it requisite to follow the petition in the detail of facts, it was for no other cause than that they are there so fully stated, and can be distinctly proved. What could be more palpably absurd in point of inequality, for instance, than that the county of Cornwall should send to Parliament almost as many Members as the whole of Scotland? And that representatives should be sent from places where hardly a house remains? And, the fact being indisputable, he would now come to consider the effect: if, according to the present system, worthy, able, and independent men were likely to be chosen as representatives of the people, he would not aim at a change; but if quite the reverse is the case, and if elections are in most

cases procured by corruption, then a speedy and effectual remedy would become essentially necessary : he wished the question to be decided on sound and fair argument. He mentioned this chiefly, because general representation is commonly supposed to be founded on natural right ; but he rested his argument not on natural right, but upon what is in itself the best system of Government, and most conducive to the happiness of the subjects. When he spoke of the Constitution of this country, he did not speak of it as of a system which had been established at any one time. No ; it had arisen out of various contingencies, and at different periods ; and its goodness and excellence originated from the very cause on account of which some persons have pretended to deny that we have any Constitution at all. But if there was one principle more strongly inculcated than another at the time of the Revolution, it was this, that the election of the House of Commons should be free. One of the resolutions carried at that important æra was, that King James had violated the freedom of election, whence it would follow that the Crown ought not in a degree to interfere in the election of those who were to represent the people ; but that the latter should be left to send to Parliament the persons who were the objects of their free choice. Another principle asserted at the Revolution was, that a man ought not to be governed by laws, in the framing of which he had not a voice, either in person or by his representative ; and that he ought not to be made to pay any tax to which he should not have consented in the same way. Now, he asked, was it possible more completely to trample upon these two principles, than to make the House of Commons consist of persons not chosen by the people ? At the Revolution also the necessity of short Parliaments was asserted ; and every departure from these principles is, in some shape, a departure from the spirit and practice of the Constitution ; yet, when they are compared with the present state of the representation, how does the matter stand ? Are the elections free ? or are Parliaments free ? With respect to shortening the duration of Parliament, it did not appear to him that it would be advantageous, without a total alteration of the present system. But if it be said that we are now in possession of that Constitution derived from our ancestors and settled at the Revolution, he would ask whether there have been

no alterations since the Revolution? Has not the patronage of Peers increased? Is not the patronage of India now vested in the Crown? Are all these innovations to be made, in order to increase the influence of the executive power; and is nothing to be done in favour of the popular part of the Constitution, to act as a counterpoise? But has there been no alteration, since the Revolution; even in the form and constitution of the House of Commons itself, which have gone to the increase of influence? The introduction of forty-five Members to represent in the British Parliament the people of Scotland, had also strengthened the hands of the Crown — an assertion which no one could dispute who was at all acquainted with the manner in which the Scotch Members were elected. The abuse of burgage tenures, in defiance of an act of King William, gave the Crown an influence in many boroughs in England. He read a passage from that act, in which it was declared that all splitting of tenure tenements, and messuages, and hereditaments, for the purpose of multiplying votes, should be deemed illegal and of no effect; and yet though this statute, by extending to all kind of towns, necessarily included burgage tenures, the latter had unaccountably been suffered to creep out of the statute, and were daily multiplied in defiance of it, for the purpose of multiplying votes and increasing influence at elections. On this subject he quoted an opinion given judicially by Lord Thurlow, when sitting as Chancellor in the House of Lords, in an appeal cause from Scotland, respecting the right of voting at elections in that part of the kingdom. That learned Lord, after having said that the right of election in Scotland had been debased, and put on the level of an English burgage tenure, the House of Commons, he said, had an unlimited jurisdiction in the trial of all questions respecting the election of its Members; but if the right of election could by law be decided in a Court of Law in England, as it was in Scotland, he was convinced an English Court of Law would not be satisfied with such a mode of election as this, that a nobleman's steward should go down to a borough with ten or twelve pieces of parchment in his hand, containing each the qualification for a vote, and having assembled round a table as many of the tenants or servants of his Lord, should distribute among them the parchments; then propose a candidate; and afterwards

collect these parchments, and declare his Lord's friend duly elected for the borough. And yet such was the mode of electing those who represented the boroughs where the right of election arose from burgage tenures. Such elections Lord Thurlow did not hesitate to call a mockery. Mr. Grey remarked, that when Mr. Pitt moved for an addition of 100 Members to be added to the counties, he could not carry his motion; and yet he had contrived to procure the nomination of 40 Members by indirect means; for he had added to the House of Peers 30 Members, who either nominated directly or by irresistible influence that number of Members of the House of Commons, as appeared from the petitions then on the table, and which the petitioners were ready to prove.

Mr. Grey then read the resolutions which are entered in the Journal at the commencement of every session, in the following words:

Resolved, "That no Peer of this realm hath any right to give his vote in the election of any Member to serve in Parliament."

Resolved, "That it is a high infringement upon the liberties and privileges of the Constitution of Great Britain, for any Lord of Parliament, or any Lord Lieutenant of any county, to concern themselves in the elections of Members to serve for the Commons in Parliament."

If the present system be right, these resolutions, and the principles upon which they are founded, must be wrong, and it would be better to expunge them from the Journals, than to allow them to remain there while the practice is so totally inconsistent with them. It may perhaps be said, however, that although the Constitution may have been in some shape impaired since the Revolution, it still remains so good as to make a change hazardous. In speaking on this subject, the influence appeared to him so excessive, and the occasion so important, that, if he should even go a little beyond the strict bounds of what it may be usual to advance in that House, he hoped it might be overlooked. Were the evils of the American war nothing? These were, in his mind, entirely owing to the unequal and corrupt representation in Parliament. It may be said, however, that the House of Commons are really a just representation of the people, because, on great emergencies,

they never fail to speak the sense of the people, as was the case in the American war, and in the Russian armament : but had the House of Commons been a real representation of the people, they would have interfered sooner on these occasions without the necessity of being called upon to do so. He feared much that that House was not a real representation of the people ; that it was too much influenced by passion, prejudice, or interest. This may, for a time, give to the executive Government apparent strength ; but no Government can be either lasting or free which is not founded on virtue ! and on that independence of mind and conduct among the people which creates energy, and leads to every thing that is noble and generous, and that alone can conduce to the strength and safety of a state.

What constitutes a state ?
 Not high-raised battlement or laboured mound,
 Thick wall or moated gate ;
 Not cities proud with spires and turrets crown'd ;
 Not bays and broad-armed ports,
 Where, laughing at the storm, proud navies ride ;
 Not starr'd and spangled courts,
 Where low-brow'd baseness wafts perfume to pride :
 No ; MEN, high-minded MEN,
 With powers as far above dull brutes endued
 In forest, brake, or den,
 As beasts excel cold rocks and brambles rude ;
 MEN who their *duties* know,
 But know their *rights*, and, knowing, dare maintain.—

If the present practice deviates from the principles of the Constitution, he had surely a good right to call upon the House to inquire into the subject, and to consider in what way it may be amended. Indeed it was evident, that many leading Members of that House considered a great part of it in a state of dependence ; else what could mean the frequent appeals to those who were emphatically called the independent Members. An honourable gentleman (he meant Mr. Powys) had in 1784 assembled round him a little senate of his own, composed of those independent country gentlemen, from which he had excluded the borough Members, as probably not coming within the description of independent Members of Parliament. Surely this might be considered as a tacit avowal, on the part of a great enemy to reform, of the absolute necessity of that very measure which he so strongly opposed.—

There were arguments for reform, which he need only to state, to produce conviction; the county of Rutland sent as many Members to Parliament as the freeholders of Yorkshire; and Cornwall as many as Rutland, Yorkshire and Middlesex together; and as many within one as the whole kingdom of Scotland. These were facts within the knowledge of the House; and surely afforded sufficient ground for a Parliamentary Reform. Here were other grounds arising from bribery, corruption, and expence at elections, which were known to every Member who had served on election Committees, though they were not known to the House as a body. Sometimes, indeed, reports from Committees stated acts of bribery and corruption, as in the cases of Cricklade and Shoreham, and Stockbridge, whose case was still depending. The most certain and effectual remedy in those cases was to establish a more popular election, which was the most likely method to secure the purity of election, and the independence of Members of that House.

Mr. Grey then said, that his intention was to make a motion for referring the petition to a Committee; but he had it not in contemplation to propose any particular plan, as there occurred to him many reasons against it. In the case which had just occurred with respect to commercial credit, the right honourable gentleman (Mr. Pitt) himself had proceeded in that precise way; he had stated the grievance or evil supposed to exist; the House, on his motion, had referred it to a Committee to investigate into the matter, and to report to the House; and, upon the report of that Committee, a bill had been brought in, and had now passed that House, which he wished sincerely might have the effect to remedy the evil. If, then, it should be said to him, why would you alarm and disturb the minds of the people, when you have no particular plan of redress to propose? he would oppose to such question, the right honourable gentleman's own mode of proceeding in the case he had mentioned; but he would say also, that it was indeed the proper and regular mode of proceeding. He did not approve of the Duke of Richmond's plan of reform, though he thought it better than the present system:—Any plan would be better which would secure such people in the House, as would vote independently, and uninfluenced by corruption:

he could certainly mention a plan which appeared to him much better; but he was not bound by the general mode of proceedings in that House, to move any specific plan, and he would therefore adopt that mode which had been usually followed, and which appeared to him the best, viz. after having stated the grievance, to move for a Committee to take it into consideration, and report to the House such mode of remedy as shall appear to them proper. He concluded with moving, that the petition should be referred to a Committee.

Mr. ERSKINE seconded the motion.

The honourable R. B. JENKINSON began with observing, that so various were the objections which occurred to him on the proposition of the honourable gentleman, that besides the difficulties which he always laboured under in addressing himself to that House, he felt the additional one of being obliged to select amongst the different arguments which offered themselves to his mind. The time, the mode, in which this question had been introduced, were highly objectionable. It had been introduced at a time when our constitution had been threatened from within, and when war had been declared against it from without: it had been introduced in a mode still more extraordinary. Without any complaint on the part of the people, a number of gentlemen associate themselves for the purpose of persuading them that they feel grievances, of which they appear not even to have dreamed. If they had succeeded in rousing the lion, could they have supposed they could have led it at their discretion? Could they have said to the people, "The constitution is defective; it must be reformed; it can be reformed only by your rising; but if you, agreeing with us in the evil, should differ with us in the remedy; if your ideas of reform should be more extensive than ours; if you should pass the line we have drawn for you, that moment you would be traitors and rebels, and we will be the first to inform against you." The example of a neighbouring country unfortunately proves that the people, once excited, can be appeased at the nod of no man, and that, under such circumstances, they would inevitably become instruments in the hands of those whose wickedness and extravagance will push them to the greatest extremities. But this was not all. This Association, after twelve months consideration, and, if we may judge from their

advertisements in the public papers, repeated and repeated meetings, bring forward to the consideration of this House the subject of parliamentary reform, without even venturing to produce a specific plan. He said, he had a right to infer from this, that some of the ablest men in this country, associated together for so considerable a space of time, had so little been able to ascertain the evil, that they had never discovered the remedy which ought to be applied to it; and that it might therefore have been expected, that instead of the proposition of the honourable gentleman, they should have heard a recantation of their principles on this subject, from an avowal of the fruitlessness of their research. But here he did not mean to rest the question; for ill chosen as had been the time, ill adapted to the circumstances of that time as had been the mode, his objections were principally to the *substance of the proposition*. He objected to it not only as productive of no good, but as productive of positive evil; not as nugatory, but in its consequences as fatal; so productive of evil, and so fatal, that he neither knew that time nor that mode which could have reconciled him to its adoption. He then remarked, that it was a subject well worthy of observation, to examine the effects of different Governments on different countries; but that it was still more curious to examine the effects of the same Government on different countries. Take, he said, absolute monarchy; it will be perceived, that in some of the countries of Europe, that Government produces all the horrors and evils of which any system can be capable; that in other countries it produces as much happiness to the people, as a system so defective as absolute monarchy must be can possibly produce. And yet no apparent reason frequently exists for this extraordinary difference. What inference did he draw from this? That the effects of Government on the people do not so much depend on general principles and general theories, as on little accidental circumstances which are frequently not even perceptible; and consequently, if plausible theories ought never to be an objection to reform, when practical grievances are felt, so defective theories ought not to be a ground for reform, when not only no practical grievance, but every practical advantage, is felt. From the honourable gentleman not having introduced a specific plan, he must of course feel some difficulty in arguing the

question. He rejoiced, however, at hearing him give up *the right of universal suffrage*. If all persons have not a natural right to vote for Members of Parliament, no particular class of persons can have that right ; the line could never be drawn. The question then is placed upon its proper ground ; it was a question of wisdom, a question of expediency, but not a question of right. Considering it then in this point of view, we ought to examine this question on the same principle on which all questions of the sort must be examined, viz. by inquiring what was the end that was to be produced ? and then considering what were the means likely to produce that end. The end was, a House of Commons that was to produce certain effects. The means of obtaining that House of Commons, were the electors. We ought not then to begin first, by considering who ought to be the electors, and then who ought to be elected ; but we ought to begin by considering who ought to be the elected, and then constitute such persons electors as would be likely to produce the best elected. Three questions, then, arise out of this principle :

1st, What is the House of Commons ?

2d, How ought it to be composed to answer its object ?

3d, What is the way of so composing it ?

Supposing, then, that there can be no doubt on the first of these questions ; that we must be all agreed that the House of Commons is meant to be a legislative body, representing all descriptions of men in this country. Without troubling the House any farther on that proposition, he would proceed to the second, and consider how it ought to be formed. In the first place, he supposed every person would agree, that the landed interest ought to have the preponderant weight. The landed interest was, in fact, the stamina of the country. In the second place, in a commercial country like this, the manufacturing and commercial interest ought to have a considerable weight, secondary to the landed interest, but secondary to the landed interest only. But was this all that was necessary ?— There were other descriptions of people, which, to distinguish from those already mentioned, he should stile *professional people*, and whom he considered as absolutely necessary to the composition of a House of Commons. By professional people, he did not mean to use that expression in the narrow and confined

sense in which it was generally used ; he meant those Members of the House of Commons who wished to raise themselves to the great offices of the State : those that were in the army ; those that were in the navy ; those that were in the law : and he maintained, that these several descriptions of persons ought to be able to find some means of entering into that House. First, it is to be considered, that by the practice of the constitution, the Ministers of the Crown are, in part, chosen out of the House of Commons. The landed interest, or country gentlemen, are, generally speaking, not ambitious of exercising those functions ; and indeed it was not to be wondered that persons of considerable property and consequence in the country, should find themselves so much employed by the management of their property, by fulfilling the office of Magistrate in their different counties, and by attending their duty as Members of Parliament, as not to be, in general, desirous of becoming Members of the Administration of the country. Indeed, it may, perhaps, be more proper that such persons should be employed in watching over the conduct of those who exercise the functions of executive Government, than that they should be employed in exercising those functions themselves. This applied still stronger to those gentlemen in the commercial line. They did not, generally speaking, come into Parliament till they were rather at an advanced period of life, and they were then so occupied with their commercial concerns, that even if they had the disposition, they could not have the leisure, to become Members of the executive Government. Unless, then, the last description of persons whom he had mentioned ; unless professional men could find their way into that House, you would strike at the root of this principle. He said, that the principle itself was a very important one ; that it had been commonly observed, that whilst in other countries men could scarcely be found to discharge the offices of the State, in this country there were always more than were sufficient ; but if the professional men he had mentioned were prevented from becoming Members of Parliament, we should lose one of the most important advantages of our Constitution. There was another reason why these persons were absolutely necessary : we were constantly in the habit of discussing in that House all the important concerns of the State ; it was necessary, there-

fore, that there should be persons in the practice of debating such questions. It would plainly appear, from what has been already said, that the very same reason which would, generally speaking, prevent either gentlemen in the landed interest, or in the commercial interest, from accepting the offices of the State, would likewise prevent them from exercising, in a considerable degree, their talents in the practice of debating. If, therefore, he said, we were desirous that there should continue in that country a constant supply of men to form vigorous and effective administrations; if we were desirous that there should continue in that House a constant supply of men to form vigorous and effective oppositions, for the purpose of watching over the conduct of such Ministers, the descriptions of persons he had mentioned were absolutely necessary to the composition of it. There was another reason; being constantly in the habit of debating in Parliament on all the different affairs of State, on the naval, on the military affairs, on the state of the law of the country, it was proper, he said, that we should have within ourselves persons belonging to these different professions, to whom we might occasionally appeal on such subjects, and in whose opinion we might confide, if their character in their profession induced us so to do. There was a fourth reason, which was, to his mind, stronger than all the rest. The professional persons he had mentioned, in fact, made that House the representation of the people. Suppose, that in that House there were only country gentlemen; they would not then be the representatives of the nation, but the representatives of the landholders of the nation. Suppose there were in that House only commercial persons; they would not be the representatives of the nation; but the representatives of the commercial interest of the nation. See, he said, from an example what would be the consequence of this. There cannot be a more important subject of legislation than the corn laws. It would be agreed by every one, that Parliament should prevent corn from either becoming so dear as to distress the poor, or from its becoming so cheap as to affect agriculture. The landholders of the country have an interest that corn should be as dear as possible; persons in the commercial and manufacturing line have an interest that corn should be as cheap as possible: it must then inevitably follow, that if one of these descriptions of

persons only found their way into the House, the interest of that description of persons would be principally considered, and however respectable those persons might be, an *esprit de corps* would naturally be found in all their proceedings. Suppose the landed and commercial interests could both find their way into this House, the landed interest, it has been proved, ought to have the preponderant weight; it would consequently be able, if it had nothing but the commercial interest to combat with, to prevent that interest from having the weight in the Constitution which it ought to have; and all descriptions of persons in the country would, in fact, be at the mercy of the landholders of it. The professional persons, then, that he had mentioned, are what make this House the representatives of the people. They have collectively no *esprit de corps*, because they are composed of persons in very different professions. They mix themselves with the landed and commercial interest, and prevent any *esprit de corps*, by this means, from affecting our proceedings. Thus, whilst the landed interest has of any one description of persons the principal weight in this House, as it ought to have; whilst the commercial interest has of any one description of persons the secondary weight in this House, as it ought to have, neither the landed nor commercial interest can materially affect each other. The interests of the different professions of the country are fairly considered, and the House, by this means, become what it could not become by any other means, the representatives of the people at large.

What then, he asked, were the means of obtaining such a House of Commons? The counties, and many of the populous boroughs, secured the election of country gentlemen; the commercial towns secured the election of certain persons in that line: but how were the last description of persons, the professional men, to find their way into that House? In the counties, local connection would, in a great measure, decide the election. However great his property, or the property of any other gentleman, might be in a county, it would go a great way to decide between A and B, two considerable persons in that county; but it could never be made use of with effect for the purpose of bringing in a person who had no landed property in that county, and who could have no connection consequently with the various interests in it. In the populous boroughs, the

same principle will in a great measure avail ; and persons who, for the first time at least, are chosen for them, are generally chosen either on account of some local connection, or by means of the exertions which a very considerable property may enable them to make. Many gentlemen, after they have come into that House by other means, by the reputation they acquire from their exertions in it, are, at a subsequent period, frequently returned by the most populous places in the country ; but if the names of the professional persons, who had come into that House for a considerable number of years, were examined, it would be found that far the greater part of them have come in, for the first time, by means of those boroughs which are called rotten boroughs ; that having in general no strong local connection, and, comparatively speaking, no very considerable property, it is scarcely possible that they should come in by any other means ; and if it was the object of the honourable gentleman, as it appeared to be, if it was the object of the petitioners whose petition they had heard read that day, as it appeared likewise to be, to abolish those close boroughs, persons of the description he had mentioned would scarcely ever find means of obtaining a seat in that House ; and those Members whom he considered himself to have proved absolutely necessary for creating that House the Representatives of the People, would be entirely excluded.

He then considered himself to have shewn that the close boroughs, as being the means of introducing professional persons to that House, were absolutely necessary to its Constitution. Did any evil arise from them ? It might be feared, that their influence collectively might be so great, as to prevent the landed and commercial interest from having that weight in the House which they certainly were entitled to. This objection had been answered before ; for this description of individuals not being composed of any one sort of persons, but of persons of a variety of professions, not being returned by persons in one interest, but by persons in very different interests, possessed collectively no *esprit de corps*, and could consequently not affect the weight of either the landed or monied interest in that House. But it might be said, to a certain degree these persons may be necessary ; but are not their numbers increasing ? The reverse he asserted was the fact. Let any gentleman look

at the various decisions on controverted elections since the passing of Mr. Grenville's act, and he will find, that in almost every case, the decision has been in favour of the more open right of election; and that it is astonishing how many boroughs there are, which were believed to be close boroughs a very few years ago, and which have since been made as open as any boroughs in the country. It has frequently been said, "If you had a House of Commons to make for the first time, would you constitute it as the British House of Commons is constituted?" This is, generally speaking, not a fair question; but he found no difficulty in answering it on the present occasion. He did not mean to say, that if he had a House of Commons to constitute in a country similar to Great Britain, he should constitute it in every little circumstance similar to the present. He did not mean to say, that it would occur to him to give Members to Liverpool and Bristol, and not give them to Manchester and Birmingham. But this he would say, that he should constitute it precisely on the same *principle*.—That by means of counties and considerable boroughs, he would endeavour to secure the election of the landed interest. That by means of the commercial towns, he would endeavour to secure the election of the commercial interest, and that he would certainly constitute a number of close boroughs, where there were not more than fifteen or twenty electors. Why? The honourable gentleman who had made the proposition of Parliamentary Reform, and the petition on their table, rather proposed uniformity of election. His ideas were the reverse. That the modes of election ought to be as varied as possible, because, if there was but one mode of election, there would, generally speaking, be but one description of persons in that House. His opinion was, that there ought to be a variety of descriptions of persons in that House; and by a very varied mode of election only could that variety of persons be secured.

We came, however, to this important question at last.—Has the House of Commons, so constituted in practice, answered the end for which it was designed? The House of Commons, as the democratic part of the Constitution, as the virtual representatives of the people, certainly, to a degree, ought to be affected by public opinions in their operations. It must,

however, never be forgot, that the first quality of the House of Commons is that of being a deliberative assembly. If public opinion is necessarily to affect their decisions on every occasion, it will cease to be that deliberative assembly, and the Members of it would have nothing to do but to go to their constituents, and desire to be directed by them in the votes they are to give on every important subject. Public opinion, then, ought to have a certain weight in the conduct of that House; but public opinion ought never to have so great a weight, as to prevent their exercising their deliberative functions. The petition on the table, and the honourable gentleman who had made the motion, have asserted, that the national debt which this country labours under, has originated from the corruption of that House. A more extraordinary assertion never has been made. The national debt has arisen from the wars in which this country has been involved. Did gentlemen mean to assert, that those wars were not agreeable to the public opinion?—Consider the history of the wars since the House of Hanover has been on the throne. The Spanish war; was that unpopular? It was entered upon on the express requisition of the people, and contrary to the known opinion of the Government. The war of 1756; was that unpopular? Never was any country engaged, he believed he might say, in a more popular war. The American war; was that unpopular? He had heard it asserted by an honourable gentleman opposite to him, that that was the war of the people. Until within a year and a half of its conclusion, nothing could be more marked than the approbation which the Public gave of that measure. It grew unpopular towards the end, as under similar circumstances every war will grow unpopular, because it was unsuccessful; and what was the consequence of this war becoming unpopular? That the Minister, who had the complete confidence of a Parliament chosen in the year 1780, was forced by that Parliament to quit his situation in less than eighteen months afterwards, in consequence of the ill success of the war! Take, he said, the administration of his right honourable friend. Would any body say, that that administration, which had had the confidence of the House of Commons, had not likewise the confidence of the Public? He would admit that that was no proof alone of the administration's

being good ; but that was not the question. The point that they were to decide was, had public opinion its full weight in the deliberation of Parliament ? by the confidence which Parliament had placed in his right honourable friend, the public opinion had proved to be in unison with the opinion of that House ; but it was said, that there were some measures of the present administration approved of by that House, and which the Public were averse from. Very possibly. The difference of that House from the Public, on any particular measure, could be no objection ; for if that House had not the power of differing from the Public, nay, if it did not sometimes differ from them, it would cease to be a deliberative assembly. But the Russian war had been stated, and much had been dwelt on this. The House were well acquainted with his opinion on that subject. He would suppose, however, for argument's sake, that his opinion was completely wrong ; that Ministers were wrong in arming for the purpose of obtaining Oczakow, and were wrong, having so armed, in disarming without obtaining it. What does that prove with respect to the decisions of that House ? Nothing, unless it could be shewn that that which was said to be the defect in our representation, was the cause of those decisions. If it could be shewn, for instance, that the Members for the close boroughs had in fact occasioned those decisions, contrary to the opinions of the landed and commercial interests in that House, the objection, as far as respects that particular case, may avail. But the reverse was the fact. A much greater number of Members for counties and populous places voted with Administration than voted against them ; and as many Members for close boroughs, in proportion, voted in the minority as in the majority of that House. The objection then proved nothing. Form a House of Commons as you please, assemble the people in Salisbury Plain ; you cannot prevent their having improper attachments and improper aversions. You cannot prevent their placing too much confidence in one Minister, because they approve of him, and too little in another, because they disapprove of him. The defect is not in the representation ; it is in human nature, and our eyes had better be turned to an improvement of that. He then said, that though public opinion he had always thought should have

a certain weight in the Constitution, he was fearful lest our Government should become too democratic. Every man who pushed the democratic principles of the Constitution too far, was, in fact, an enemy to it. He was of the same opinion with respect to those who pushed the monarchical or aristocratical principles of it beyond their proper limits. It was certainly the principle of the British Constitution, that monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy should serve as a control on each other; but it was likewise a principle, that on ordinary occasions they should and must co-operate. If the monarchy, the aristocracy, and the democracy are too much unconnected, the purpose of control may be answered, but the purpose of co-operation will be defeated. No one of the principles, therefore, ought to be forced beyond a certain extent. If any person was to be forced to live under a simple monarchy, he would choose a moderate monarchy. If any person was forced to live under a simple aristocracy, he would choose a moderate aristocracy. If any person was forced to live under a simple democracy, he would, of course, choose a moderate democracy. If then you are to live under the three united, it becomes still more necessary that each should be moderate in itself; because without that, co-operation, which is absolutely necessary, could not subsist between them. He declared, that no person had more extensive ideas of liberty than he had; but it was not by any exclusive attachment to the democratic part of our Constitution, that that love of liberty was to be manifested; democratic tyranny was at least as bad as either monarchical or aristocratical tyranny. The liberty we had the blessing to enjoy, did not arise from any part of the constitution, but from the operation of the different parts of it on each other. In the true sense of liberty, it was the end of all Government, men fled from a state of nature to a state of society; because, in the former, the first blessing of liberty, security, could not be obtained. But when he talked of liberty, he meant not any abstract ideas of the rights of man; he meant practical liberty. Of this he might say, that was the best Government which had the most of it; or, in other words, that was the best Government where there was the greatest security, and the least restraint. He was not so ignorant, however, of human nature, as to suppose that every country could enjoy an equal

share of it. The liberty of a country must depend on its Government; and very little experience, indeed, would teach us, that different Countries require very different Governments; that in considering what Government would suit a country, the extent of it, the population of it, nay, the climate, must in some degree be attended to. How, then, were we to judge whether the Government was well adapted to the country?—By the effects it produced. Is property secure? Is the administration of justice correct? Are the laws mild? Do the lower orders of the community appear contented? Wherever these blessings exist, the Government from which they originate must necessarily be good. Let us judge, he said, of the British constitution on this principle. Is not property secured? Is not the administration of justice pure and correct? Have we not, in short, arrived at a pitch of prosperity unparalleled in either ancient or modern history? What, then, must be that tree which could produce such fruit! But it was not on the effects of our system only that it was necessary to rest; those who had passed their lives in the studies of speculative retirement, and who had become acquainted with human nature but from books, have beheld with regret the capricious tyrannies of absolute monarchy, the systematic oppression of aristocracy, the turbulent, factious, and unsettled disposition of democracy. They considered that a system might be founded out of the three, where the faults of each might correct the faults of the other, and where the virtues of each might prove an aid to the virtues of the other. Should we, then, who enjoy such blessings from such a system, on the pretence of trifling defects in the theory, be disposed to hazard the loss of its advantages? Should we contemplate the spots of the sun, regardless of its splendor? Should we seek glasses to magnify those spots which, to common eyes, are not even visible, and when the lustre of the celestial body is so great, that no part of nature can complain of a defect of its rays? But the spots of the sun do in some degree diminish its splendor. In works of art, it frequently happens that those which appear defective, are in fact the reverse; speculative theories are generally founded on ideas of perfection which do not exist: human institutions must be adapted not only to the virtues, but to the weakness and passions of mankind. Thus is it frequently necessary to follow that by

indirect ways, which by the straight road we never could hope to arrive at. That there were theoretic defects in the composition of the House of Commons, was not what he pretended to deny; it was incumbent, however, on those who proposed a reform, to prove that those defects affected the practice of the constitution. He contended that he had proved the reverse; that they were necessary to the constitution; and that any attempt to reform them might prove dangerous to its very existence.

Mr. POWYS could not content himself with giving a silent vote upon so momentous an occasion—and first, before he proceeded to discuss the question before the House, he wished to answer a charge adduced against him of his having made a distinction between the Members who composed the House, by attaching to a part the appellation of independent. By this epithet he certainly did not mean the landed interest alone—he meant persons neither holding nor expecting any offices. It was not, he said, his intention to go over those general grounds which had been so often debated, and on which the opinion of the House had been always the same. On the present day, Mr. Grey had come forward as the organ and delegate of a society, constituted for the purpose of checking the progress of disaffection and discontent—or waiting for the operation of the public mind, and of holding no communication with visionary speculators. In process of time, however, these friends of the people joined with the performers from another theatre, and they acted together, at the Crown and Anchor Tavern more than once. If, however, at their meetings inflammatory language were held—if there were any who talked of embodying all the proud flesh and blood of the country, he was convinced that such speeches proceeded not from the crowds of the people, and was totally disowned by them. Mr. Grey had said that the example of France ought not to deter the House from adopting a reform. To this argument he did not feel disposed to accede, after the sentiments disclosed by M. Condorcet, which sentiments he begged leave to read—(They related to the formation of the Society of the Friends of the People, which would probably produce the same symptoms in England as had preceded the convocation of the States General of France in 1788.) Our Constitution, the wonder of the world, had, in

former ages, been the delight and envy of mankind, when all other nations lay groaning under despotism, or, what was worse, under anarchy; and he trusted it would ever be found a happy exception from the confusion into which other countries were hurried by their efforts to escape from tyranny. The happy frame of our Government freed us from the two extremes.—When the representative part of the Legislature had an identity of interest, and a conformity of sentiments with its constituents, it inevitably followed, that the people were well governed and happy. That this was the case at the present moment with us, appeared so manifest, that it would be time thrown away to prove it. When gentlemen talked of restoring the people to equal representation, he desired to know, to what criterion that equality could be referred? He desired to hear, what that period was where the representor and represented met constitutionally, and where the standard of constitutional perfection stood? The House of Commons was an organ, not merely to speak the public voice, or register the public opinions, but possessing judgement to deliberate, and power to execute the result of that deliberation. As such, it could listen to no such measures as were now dictated; and the motion should therefore have his dissent.

Mr. WINDHAM, after stating his anxiety to deliver his sentiments, confessed that he felt infinite difficulty in connecting, combining, and comparing all the reasons and arguments offered by the honourable gentleman from whom the motion had proceeded. Never had there been a question offered to the House so repugnant to reason, and so adverse to every principle of common sense. It was a question, in the discussion of which objections of the most opposite nature arose every moment, and when one had been answered, others immediately started up, like Bayes's troops, as if nothing had happened. Much attention as he had paid to the speech of his honourable friend, he had not been able to discover whether the question was a question of expediency or of right. Indeed Mr. Grey must excuse him, if he considered him only as a speck or spot (luminous perhaps) when compared with the vast importance of the subject.

Parvissima est ipsa puella sui.
He put him out of his consideration, and weighed him in his

scale only as an atom. His honourable friend proceeded very properly on the ground of expediency ; others on the ground of right. The last were certainly the most numerous and the most powerful. All the petitions that had been presented stated the right, and indeed his honourable friend could not correct the contagion. Those persons who supported the doctrine of right, supported it on the supposed natural equality of men, and on this position, that the will of the majority ought to be obligatory on the minority. A discussion of these two principles was better adapted to a society of learned men than to a large deliberative assembly ; and he could not but lament that they had ever been supposed to attach to the business of common life. To apply these metaphysical arguments as rules of conduct would, in his own opinion, be like turning a mill by the power of music, or raising a wall, like another Amphion, by a tune. On each, however, of these principles of equality, and the paramount nature of the majority of wills, he wished to say a few words. With regard to the first, that run so trippingly from the tongue, he should be glad to hear a definition of it ; but no—those who were so fond of it never would vouchsafe to give one ; or, if they did, it was in the nature of answering *idem per idem*, or *ignotum per ignotius*. The definition he had formed in his own mind was this—that as the end of all government was to produce the greatest possible sum of all human happiness, so, in producing it, Government was not to look for its residence in any particular formed part. No ravages were to be made on the happiness of the greater part for the purpose of conferring that happiness on the smaller. Whether this definition would be received by such persons as supported the doctrine of right, he could not tell. He believed, however, that it would not ; for from it resulted all possible inequality, particularly with respect to property. They seemed to say, that as long as persons continued to talk abstractedly of mankind, they must consider them as equal. He came next to the second of these pernicious principles, viz. that in all societies and states the will of the majority ought to govern. In opposition to this he felt no difficulty in affirming, that it was not a general principle of government, nor consonant to the spirit and the practice of ours in particular, that the numerical majority should decide for the

whole. An ingenious author, whom he admired more as a philologist than a politician (Mr. Horne Tooke), had said, with some pleasantry, that many of the evils of life arose for want of a right understanding of particles. Just so, he imagined, many of the errors of these new political philosophers originated in a misunderstanding of particles. They said, for instance, that all government proceeded *from* the people: now if, instead of the particle *from*, they would insert the particle *for*, their proposition would be not only intelligible, but true; and yet on the stupid confounding of these two, not indeed by stupid, but very ingenious, men, did they rest their wild and injurious speculations. When he denied the right of the majority to govern the whole, and decide in all cases, he might be asked what he would substitute for it — if he would take the minority? He would not say so, though even that proposition would not be more absurd than the other, in the manner they argued upon it. He would rest the decision on the merits and the justice of the point to be decided; and as men would see those more or less clearly in proportion to their greater or less degrees of information, it followed that the majority was not the most likely to be in the right. If twenty persons of ordinary capacity were to decide on a question by a mere majority, was it a certain rule that the majority would be right? By no means. If to these twenty as many more are added, would the certainty be greater? It would be less; for as the number was augmented, the deficiency of deliberative judgement, the most essential quality, would be greater. If, therefore, the plan of these reformers, who said that nothing but a mere majority ought to govern, were to be carried, the nation must be undone. Applying this argument to the case of the Revolution; was it not notorious that the Revolution was produced by the minority, and yet that event had received universal applause. Of majorities there were three kinds: the first was the majority of reason; the second of numbers; the third of force. A good man would make use of the first and third; a bad man would adopt the third alone: but neither the bad man nor the good would make use of the second majority. To strip this question — if two men, meeting one man in a wood, were to contend that they had a right to murder him, it did not matter whether the numbers were

two millions and one million, though it might be better, for the sake of argument, to take the first mode of stating it. Supposing, then, that two men were to meet one man, it would be of no avail for the one man to say that he was not in society, the majority would immediately vote that he was. Much had been said of the theory of the Constitution—the expression imported much: it was something that might easily be mistaken; it was an Etrurian vase, which, if some were to think made for the purpose of containing oil, and others for the purpose of holding water, both might be led into a ludicrous mistake. Besides, this idea of restoring the Constitution to its ancient theory, opened a door for the wildest schemes of the wildest reformers. The Petitioners had demanded that the House should represent the whole nation. If it were to represent the whole nation, where was the necessity of King and Lords? and this these Petitioners knew, for they were excellent engineers. They knew that there was a gentle ascent terminated by a rock, on which was placed a fortification. They would not attack the heights of monarchy first, with all its thunder of privileges: they would make their advances regularly, and take ground on the side of representation; when they had made good their station there, they knew that success must attend their endeavours. It had been said that the people had a right to demand; that the extension of the duration of Parliament from three years to seven was an invasion of their rights. For his own part, he did not know whether it would not be an invasion of their rights to make the duration of Parliaments again triennial; for, upon this mode of reasoning, every thing but pure democracy was an invasion of their rights. Few grievances had been complained of by Mr. Grey, and those few operated against him. In the case of 1784 he differed in opinion with him. It had been a complaint against all former Parliaments, that they had been too much addicted to the Minister of the day. As soon, however, as they went against him, they were thrown to the people, and devoured by them with all the savage ferocity of hounds. At the present period, the effect of legitimate assemblies, emanating from the people, had been seen in France. The present National Convention, though the legitimate representatives of the people, were overawed by two other bodies of men.

I think there be six Richmonds in the field. They were kept by those societies in the most strict submission. You shall be King, and I will be Viceroy over you.

With respect to a perfect coincidence in opinion with the people, he contended that all good proceeded on a difference in opinion with the people, and that nothing could be so calamitous to the House as to become the agents of the people. For his own part, he thought that a case of a different sort ought to have been made out. The probable loss ought to be opposed to the probable gain. It ought to be recollected that the motions of the heavenly bodies could be known to the end of centuries, but the impulses of the heart could not be known from one day to another. The grievances then ought first to be felt before a remedy ought to be applied; for should the people think such a reform as the present ineffectual, they would not stop. To give them any thing short of the entire completion of their wishes would be like throwing crumbs to hungry men, who have stomachs for greater things. Mr. Grey, therefore, might open the door, but would he be able to shut it? No.—Did he not know that some things will take fire as well by cold as by hot water? Did he imagine that throwing cold water on lime would put it out? No.—But even were he, for his own part, to be sure that the people would stop at a particular spot, still he would not agree to it. If there was even no mischievous consequences couched in the measure, he would object to it, as producing no good. Besides, he denied the extent of the grievance complained of:

“ All is not offence that indiscretion

“ Finds, or rashness deems so.”

But those offences were, he said, so mixed and interwoven with perfections, that the one could not be removed without destroying the other. The House could not pretend to correct blemishes in the Constitution. It was like the style of ancient authors, of which the critics said, *Qui corrigit delet tam vitia virtutibus mixta*. What some people called its faults could not be corrected without destroying all its valuable parts. Many things, he was aware, might have escaped him. Some circumstances more might transpire. If a discussion must take place on such subjects, he would advise the House to drink

deep or taste not. If the principles were to be examined, the fallacy of them would soon be detected; and if any dared to inhibit, he would promise them that they would be reduced to the condition of being the babies of a girl. He disliked this mixture of politics and metaphysics.—[A loud laugh.]—With much warmth the right honourable gentleman desired those who disliked his metaphysics to answer them. This species of argument had commenced with the American war, and had been carried down to the present period. It was a contemptible chegoe, which, if suffered to penetrate the skin, would bury itself in the inflammation which it had excited, and eat to the bone, defying the power of art to remove it, although in the first instance an old woman might pick it out with a needle.

The Honourable THOMAS ERSKINE said, that had he been absent at the opening of the debate, and unacquainted with the motion before the House, he should have thought, from the manner and argument of the honourable gentleman who had just sat down, that some proposition had been brought forward not only big with ruin to the interests of this country, but such a one as had never before entered into the mind of any man to project. At all events, he certainly never could have collected from the smile of approbation which covered the features of the right honourable gentleman opposite to him (Mr. Pitt), that the motion which, to his perfect satisfaction, was reprobated and ridiculed, was no other than the very motion which *he himself* first formally introduced, and made it the first characteristic of his public life to originate and support. He must also bring it to the same right honourable gentleman's recollection, that the disturbances and revolutions of the world, and the progress of principles dangerous to monarchy which were now set up as reasons against all reformation, were by himself made the very basis of his own similar application to the House at the close of the American war. At that time a mighty Republic had just formed itself on the other side of the Atlantic; but having been forced into that form by the corruptions which he sought to destroy, (a principle equally applicable at this moment as then) that mighty revolution, and the agitations which accompanied it, instead of

forming an objection, was made the very argument to support the necessity of regenerating our own Constitution.

He said he should not attempt to imitate the honourable gentleman who spoke last in the subtlety of logical argument, or in the eloquence of declamation, but must remark, that it would have been more worthy of his talents to have fairly stated his honourable friend's propositions and arguments, and then to have refuted them, than to assume those which never were maintained. Did his honourable friend, for instance, insist upon universal representation as an original and indispensable principle of this or any other Government? or did the petition which he presented assert that principle, or pray for its adoption? His honourable friend put the rights of mankind in general, and of the people of England in particular, upon truer and higher grounds: he maintained that liberty, property, and security from all oppression, were the unalienable rights of mankind; that all government existed for their benefit; and that whatever representation, general or particular, conducted the most to secure them, they had a right to institute for their protection. But as they were not assembled to form a government, but to support one already established, he disclaimed all resort to theory, and maintained his proposition as justified by practical necessity. He would, therefore, recall the attention of the House to the motion before it. What was it? It was simply that they should take into their consideration the petition which Mr. Grey presented, and which, upon being read, the House had received; and the single question was, whether the petition contained sufficient matter, if taken to be true, to render it their duty, either in justice or in wise policy, to endeavour to remove what it complained of? He said, if taken to be true, because as the Petitioners offered to verify it clause by clause, the House could not, without inquiry, or rather in the teeth of their own certain knowledge, vote it to be false. What then did the petition assert? It asserted that this House, which is invested with the mighty authority of the representatives of the whole People of Great Britain, were chosen by a number smaller than the subscribers to some of the petitions, which to-day had been treated with neglect: it stated that this gross inequality was rendered more unequal by the disproportion of the bodies who elected: it as-

serted that elections were, and must, in spite of all laws, continue to be procured by notorious corruption ; that Peers of Parliament, sent up to the other House from their influence in this, sent by their mandates others to represent them ; and that small as the numbers were, compared with the whole people who elected the majority of the House of Commons, they themselves were but nominal electors, the majority of those who sat there being elected by the patronage of the Crown and a few great men of the realm, by means of which the people had lost all share in our balanced Constitution. Those were the facts they stated, and the simple question was, whether the House was prepared to say, in the face of the public, and to the people they represented, What of all this ? Be it so ; let these things continue : for that would be their language if they negatived the motion. To that it had been answered, that those theoretical defects, which the language of discontent had worked up into a libel upon the present Government, belonged to its original Constitution ; that under it the country had improved from age to age, and arrived at its present prosperity and glory. He denied it. He said that there was not in practice, which both sides had agreed to resort to, the smallest analogy between the ancient and modern House of Commons. He said that before the Revolution, when the executive power of the country was in all its ancient vigour, ruling by terror and the instruments of authority, and whilst by the free spirit of the English people the Commons were only growing up in strength, and, by advancing upon the other branches of the Government, were gradually bringing the Constitution to what it now was, the defective representation of the people was a mere defect in theory, but of small account in practice : it was then of such immense importance to the people to struggle against the prerogative, that it was of little consequence who were the electors, if the people were but possessed of an organ where their authority could be deposited and act with force ; the Crown had not then the means of influence and corruption either amongst the electors or the elected, and particular districts of the nation were not then bought, in order to sell again at discretion, not merely those who had been bought, but the rest of the nation, whose interests were left in the hands of the small number which constituted the

elective body. Whoever looked at the English history would perceive, that in the infancy of that House, and before the confirmation of its high privileges, the Commons were uniformly bent on maintaining popular privileges, and formed a *real* and *practical* balance against the Crown. There was no danger in those days that the representatives of the few would betray the interests of the many. The Crown and the Commons were separated by fear and jealousy, and when the Commons got together, no matter how elected, they acted on that principle. This was so true, that even Charles and James, when the Commons were risen, were driven to the garbling of corporations : but that since the Revolution, and particularly since the creation of the immense revenues which had grown up since that time, a new order of things had arisen, and, as all government stood in practice and not in theory, the English Government might be said to be completely changed ; corruption had taken the place of power, and therefore, although a House of Common, elected *in any way*, having the people's authority, was sufficiently constituted to struggle against power, and although the defective state of the representation had, in that case, no operation, yet, when influence and corruption superseded authority, the popular branch of the Constitution might be strictly said to be dissolved. A small part of the nation was now in the habitual course of either selling the interests of the whole, or else their elective franchise was the absolute property of some individual, frequently the Crown, who sold it for them, and the persons elected devoted themselves implicitly to the Crown for the emoluments which were carved out of the people's substance to feed them, by which that House had become a Council of the Crown, and not an active balance against its power.

He said those were no imaginations of his ; they stood not only upon all history, but upon a modern authority which would be respected by the House, and, he knew, would be particularly bowed to by the honourable gentleman who had spoke last.

A modern author of great eloquence, said Mr. Erskine, speaking of those changes in the English Government, truly said,

“ The virtue, spirit, and essence of a House of Commons consists in its being the express image of the feelings of the nation. It was not instituted to be a control *upon* the people, as of late it has been taught by a doctrine of the most pernicious tendency, but as a control *for* the people.”

And he therefore thus indignantly deplored its lapse from that character :

“ The distempers of monarchy were the great subjects of apprehension and redress in the last century ; in this, the distempers of Parliament. The power of the Crown, almost dead and rotten as prerogative, has grown up anew, with much more strength and far less odium, under the name of influence—an influence which operated without noise and violence ; which converted the very antagonist into the instrument of power ; which contained in itself a perpetual principle of growth and renovation ; and which the distresses and the prosperity of the country equally tended to augment, was an admirable substitute for a prerogative that, being only the offspring of antiquated prejudices, had moulded in its original stamina irresistible principles of decay and dissolution. The ignorance of the people is a bottom but for a temporary system ; but the interest of active men in the state is a foundation perpetual and infallible.

“ When the House of Commons was thus made to consider itself as the master of its constituents, there wanted but one thing to secure it against all possible future deviation towards popularity—an *unlimited* fund of money to be laid out according to the pleasure of the Court.”—That fund they all knew existed, augmenting itself alike by the distresses as by the prosperity of the country. But it might be said, had not the nation been equally prosperous under this new system of practice ? He answered No. He maintained that the mighty agitations which now convulsed and desolated Europe, that the disastrous events of the moment which were opposed to the motion before the House, owed their very existence to the corruptions of the English Government, which they sought to do away.—[Here a laugh from the other side of the House.]

Mr. Erskine said, there was nothing so easy as that sort of answer. It would be, however, more decent and parliamen-

tary to expose his mistakes by reasonings. He should listen to them with candour, and follow them, if he was convinced ; but till then he would continue to assert, that all the calamities which they deplored at that moment had no other origin than the corruption of the House of Commons : and for the first part of the historical deduction he had authorities, some of which the right honourable gentleman would not be disposed to dispute.

His illustrious father (the Earl of Chatham) maintained that a taxation for revenue in America, the fatal cause of the American quarrel and separation, was devised to supply the fountain of corruption in that House ; Sir George Saville insisted upon it with indignation in his celebrated letter to his constituents ; and the celebrated author whose work he had already cited detailed all the melancholy history in that too-prophetic speech which he delivered in the beginning of that war. He knew the war was for a long time popular in the country, because it was their war, and the people unfortunately connected that House with themselves, though there was no substantial connection. Had that House been in theory what it was in practice, the Executive Government merely, without an imaginary connection with the people, how different would have been the event—jealousy would have prevented what confidence produced. It must be remembered, too, that since revenue was to be raised, which either England or America was by their authority to provide, they artfully created a powerful interest in the quarrel by American taxation : but, with all those advantages, the people saw the approaching calamity, and petitioned to avert it long, long before it was too late to have saved America to this country.

He said, therefore, that if this House had then in substance represented the people, America at that moment would still have been an affectionate colony, or, if emancipated by the natural progressions of the world, she would now be spreading the roots of monarchy round and round the globe. They planted her in their better days, and gave her the image of their own constitution. Her governors were Kings, her councils the Aristocracy, and her assemblies the Commons ; and she felt both pride and prosperity in the re-

flected greatness of this country. But all that mighty fabric their corruptions undermined and destroyed, and the reign of republicanism began from the abuse of monarchical establishment. This was the first stage of the proof, and the rest too palpably followed it.

The effects of so distant a revolution, brought on by the corruption of our European Government, could not have communicated itself so suddenly to Europe, if other governments had not been equally corrupt. It certainly was not affection for freedom, but to distress England, that embarked France in the American cause; but as that detestable principle could not be openly avowed, her press became free in arguing the justice of the quarrel, and she sent the prime of her army to support it in the field. The consequences every body had seen. Her armies, after shedding their blood in the resistance of monarchical despotism and corruption, and enjoying the triumph of republican resistance, returned home to France to see monarchy in a still more odious and disgraceful form: they soon applied the principles their Government had taught them to the Government itself, and monarchy in France passed away like an enchantment. Such was the power of opinion. He maintained, therefore, that no fact in history or politics from the beginning of the world was more firmly supported; that the proposition (which some had affected to laugh at) was strictly true; and that the corruptions of the English House of Commons, by resorting to taxation in America for the means of corruption, and carrying on the war to the final separation, had wholly and certainly produced all the changes which agitated the world at that moment.

Mr. Erskine said, if the separation of America, and the consequent revolutions of Europe, might thus be traced to the causes he had assigned, and that they arose from no other, every man's conscience told him to be true, how could it possibly be denied that the present system of English Government had been practically mischievous, when but for those bitter fruits of their corruption they would have been free at this moment from a debt of one hundred and twenty millions, which crippled all their exertions, and have seen the nations around them, as well as the inhabitants of Eng-

land, bowing to their Constitution as the great type and example of happiness, instead of seeing (he was now speaking their own language) the first principles of Government broken up, and the country involved in a war to prevent even the internal dissolution of her own Constitution.

There were some, he said, who, forced by their former opinions and practice to admit the existence of those evils and the advantage of some reformation, yet objected to the generality of the motion and the want of a specific object. He, on the contrary, thought that the generality of the application constituted at once its practicability and its safety. The Petitioners recollected, as they ought to do, that they were not without a Government which, with all its defects, was still worthy of their confidence and affection: they did not, therefore, step into their place to legislate for themselves, but looked up to their wisdom and authority to provide, as in other cases, for the common good. And it was truly said by an honourable gentleman whose works he had already cited, that nothing would be more dangerous than for Parliament to take advantage of the inartificial mode in which the people express their wishes, or to take post upon their silence. — “If we should be able, by dexterity, power, or intrigue, to disappoint the expectations of our constituents, what will it avail us? We shall never be strong or artful enough to parry or to put by the irresistible demands of our situation, which calls upon us with a voice which *will* be heard. If *all* the nation are not equally forward to press this duty upon us, yet be assured that they all equally expect we should perform it. The respectful silence of those who wait upon your pleasure ought to be as powerful with you as the call of those who require your service as their right. It is not wise to force the people to speak out more plainly what they plainly mean.”

But though no specific remedy was called for, the general nature of it was obvious. It obtruded itself upon the view from the bare consideration of the complaint. The complaint was, that the people had no control in the choice of their representatives; that they were either chosen amidst riot and confusion, and amidst bribery and corruption in the larger districts, or by the absolute authority of a few individuals in the smaller; that no private fortune, even if election were free,

could bring up the electors to the poll at a county contest, or the absent freemen in those numerous cities where the election is in the corporation, or stand the expence of the final issue in that House.

The principle of the remedy, therefore, must present itself to every mind alike, though different persons might differ in the details. It could be no other than to simplify and equalise the franchise of election, to make each body of electors too large for individual corruption, and the period of choice too short for temptation, and, by the subdivision of the places of election, to bring the electors together without confusion and within every man's reach. Surely this was practicable.

With regard to the time, against which so much had been objected, it appeared to him, that if ever there was one season more critically favourable than another for the object, it was at that very moment. When, indeed, the arbitrary monarchy of France was battering down by the exertions of a great people, and nothing was seen but virtuous exertion and exultation, it might be admitted that in such a conjuncture men might run before the mark, and confound principles together which had no connection. Such was the alledged, but not the proved, state of England when his honourable friend gave notice last year of his motion. The objection then had, therefore, at least, a *plausible*, though not a just, foundation. But, good God! said Mr. Erskine, how different, on the admission of the objectors to the times, was the state of the country at the present moment—starting back with horror at the crimes and calamities of France, and seemingly forgetting all distresses in an enthusiasm for their own Government! Surely common sense proclaimed that to be the hour of reformation, more especially when it was left to themselves to originate and to fashion it. So far from being urged on by the people to go too far, they trod like men who feared that the ground would break under them, and could hardly be brought up to the point which their understandings dictated. Let them seize, therefore, that happy and providential crisis to do, with popularity and safety, what to save their country must be done at last: let them exhibit to the world the vessel of the English State riding amidst the storms of the world, held by her three equal anchors, which keep her motionless and in safety by drawing her equally in

their different directions. This was the way to perpetuate the love of monarchy. If they really thought that a spirit of discontent walked abroad, and menaced the safety of Government, let them make haste to lay it, by rendering Government respectable. If they wished to expose and to discountenance the visions and theories of the day, and to prevent their practical effects, let them exhibit to the People of England, in practice, the real genuine Constitution of their fathers, and give them the happiness which flows from its administration. This was the cure for sedition, and the road to content. He should not farther detain the House at that late hour.

Several gentlemen rose to speak, and several called out adjourn.

Mr. STANLEY moved to adjourn the debate.

Mr. Chancellor PITT said he wished the question to be as speedily decided as possible ; but as from unavoidable circumstances the debate had begun at a very late hour, and many gentlemen were desirous of delivering their sentiments upon it, he should have no objection to adjourn the debate.

The question of adjournment was put, and the House divided, Ayes, 181 ; Noes, 109.

The House adjourned.

Tuesday, 7th May.

Mr. STANLEY, who moved yesterday for the adjournment, rose to state, that he conceived the subject to be of the greatest consequence, and made his motion in order to afford an opportunity to all the honourable Members to deliver their sentiments, for the mutual improvement of all. The Constitution, consisting of three branches, was admirably adapted to promote the liberty and happiness of the nation, but they had their distinct provinces. The Chief Magistrate would naturally guard his own prerogatives ; the Peers would watch over their privileges, and it was to be hoped that the House of Commons would devote itself in an especial manner, to secure the well-being of the people. The Commons should not wait to be instructed and excited by their constituents to promote their interests, but they should fore-run them in every thing. If there was danger, it ought to be discovered, and guarded against, in the first instance, by the representative body. If

disorders prevailed in the Constitution, it belonged to them to apply the remedy ; or if palliatives were necessary, they were the most proper to apply them. The reform of Parliament should proceed from the Parliament itself, if a reform was necessary. He declined entering into the question whether that House required any amendment in the state of its representation ; if he were called upon to speak his sentiments, he should not hesitate to say that it did require it, but it was of the utmost moment to consider whether this was the fit time for it. Many things might be proper under particular circumstances which would be highly improper in a different situation.— This was a season of war, alarm and internal disquietude, men's passions were inflamed, and the best disposed were not in a temper to agitate great changes. He did not allude to the affairs of France ; whatever their principles were, he knew that Englishmen loved their liberty, and adored the Constitution. But heats and animosities had lately unfortunately prevailed in this country to such a degree, that he feared this was not the time to agitate the question before the House. He admitted that the Executive power must have a control somewhere, and that House was certainly the place for it. But sooner than risk the dangers of innovations at improper seasons, he would consent for a time, especially under a mild Government, to have his liberties suspended. Under an Aurelius, or Henry IV. he would prefer the abridgement of his freedom to those violences that are ever attendant upon revolutions.— Although he was a steady friend to the Reform of Parliament, he desired it to be understood that he was so under some modifications. He entirely differed from those gentlemen who wished to extend the elective franchise to all. Amendments were necessary, and when the time should come best adapted for the purpose, he would heartily concur with the Friends of Liberty in promoting them.

Mr. BUXTON thought it his duty, upon the present subject, to express his sentiments, and not to confine himself to a silent vote upon the occasion. He professed himself to have ever been the friend of reform, and should certainly, if the circumstances of the time were in his mind such as were compatible therewith, give it his support. But he thought the present period, when we were involved in war, an unfit period

for entering into any discussion whatever upon the subject. He thought it a point of too great nicety to be tampered with in the moment of uncertainty; it should be only entered upon when the principles of the people were more fixed and settled than they are at present. With regard to the Russian armament, which had been at various times alluded to, he was decidedly of opinion, both then and now, that it was a proper and politic measure, though the people exclaimed against it; and if the Minister had not been prevented from the prosecution of his plan, we should not now have seen what every sincere lover of liberty must deplore, the downfall of the liberties of Poland, and the partition of her territory between ambitious powers. At present the people at large were, he thought, content with their situation: they have been alarmed by the importation of French principles, which tend to confusion, anarchy, and rebellion, and they would rather submit to some inconveniences than press the proposed reform at the risk of disturbing the internal tranquillity of the country; were it not so, there can be no doubt but that your table would have been covered by petitions from every county in the kingdom; and when that should take place, he would cheerfully concur with their wishes. He concluded by declaring his opinion, that the present was an unfit time for inquiry, and upon that ground should oppose going into the Committee.

Mr. DUNCOMBE said, that, upon the present occasion, he could not be silent; that he ever had been, and ever should remain, the firm friend and supporter of a rational Reform in Parliament; he had twice had the honour of seconding motions made by his right honourable friend (Mr. Pitt) upon that subject, though he much feared at the present time he should dissent from the opinion he held; he was sorry to differ from him, because there was no person of whom he entertained a higher opinion, or for whom he had a more sincere regard, and, in his opinion, he had merited, for his support of a Parliamentary Reform, the highest praise—greater praise, in that respect, than the right honourable gentleman opposite him (Mr. Fox) who had ever professed himself the friend of reform, but had never brought forward any specific motion for that purpose. With regard to the objections which had been stated against reform, he seemed to differ widely from the gentlemen who stated them;

he did not see the present period in that alarming point of view in which it had appeared to other gentlemen—there was nothing which he could see in the present time that rendered it unfit for the discussion of any subject whatever. The other objection which had been urged, seemed to him equally frivolous, the disturbances in France, which had arisen from the innovations made in the form of their Government: dreadful indeed would those calamities be to this country, if they should prevent us from protecting and supporting our liberties, or from entering into any discussion upon the reform of such abuses as may have insinuated themselves into our Constitution. It had been predicted by an eminent statesman and politician, the late Earl of Chatham, that the abuses of Parliament must be reformed before the end of the present century; he was much inclined to believe the prediction; for when the people raised their voice, they must be heard; he was well assured, that it was now the opinion of the majority of the people, that a reform in the state of the representation was become necessary; he wished Parliament therefore, to make a merit of granting what would otherwise be forced from them. He urged the great benefits arising from well-timed concessions, and the evils that might thereby be avoided: by a well-timed concession we might have saved America; for if in the first commencement of our disputes with that country, we had consented to have given up one half of what we were afterwards compelled to—we might have saved ourselves the loss of the colonies, and the disgrace of submission. Another instance of the benefits that might arise from well-timed concession, and the dangers attending the withholding what is proper and necessary, he adduced from the disputes between the unfortunate Charles and his Parliament; he contended, that if Charles had made a merit of granting at first what he was compelled at last to surrender, he would have preserved his Crown, and avoided the dismal catastrophe which followed. If he were allowed to give an impartial opinion on the plan proposed by the honourable mover of the present question, he appeared to him to lean rather too much to the principle of popular representation, which he disapproved of; at least he had gone so far as to say, that he did not entirely disapprove of the plan of reform laid down by the Duke of Richmond; though he was an admirer

of rational reform, he could not assent to a measure of this kind. An honourable Member, (the late Henry Flood) had some years ago introduced a plan of reform, which, in most respects, met his approbation; it was very different from the present plan. He should, however, then vote with the honourable gentleman, (Mr. Grey) who, he conceived, was not treated with sufficient liberality by some gentlemen. Mr. Duncombe alluded to the assertion of Mr. Jenkinson on the former day, relative to rotten boroughs, and said, that honourable gentleman spoke as if Parliament ought not to be the representatives of the people. The associations of last winter, while they were so strenuously supporting the Constitution, acknowledged the existence of abuses, and he conceived the present as fit a time for their correction as any other.

Sir WILLIAM YOUNG felicitated himself upon the advantage which he then possessed by addressing himself to those who had been elected to that House by persons of the description that he hoped would ever enjoy the right of sending Members to Parliament. If the present measure should be adopted; he had little hopes of a patient hearing by a House that should be elected by those who seemed to be peculiarly favoured by the petition that gave rise to this debate. He had uniformly maintained one opinion since he began his political career, viz. that the country had too much of a commercial turn, and that its commerce would soon become more than a match to its virtues. He rejected the cautious manner in which the business was treated yesterday, and he meant to speak out plainly and fully. The petitioners proposed a measure that evidently tended to throw weight into a scale that preponderated too much already. Were it not for burgage tenure boroughs, and others that were bought—[Hear! Hear!] Sir William reminded the House that he had declared he intended to speak out, and therefore he would repeat, that boroughs bought and controlled by men of property formed the only balance to the commercial influence, which was increasing by too rapid strides, and which ought to be checked. The Constitution of the House of Commons, as at present formed, was absolutely necessary to the support of the Constitution of the kingdom: alter the former, and the latter must perish. He denied that true representation was founded either upon property or num-

bers abstractedly considered. A delegation of Members to that House ought ever to be of gentlemen answering the description of those whom he then addressed, persons having one common interest with those who sent them there. Sir William Temple, in his account of the Constitution of the United Provinces, states, that there is more property in Amsterdam, and more numbers in the Province of Holland, than all the others united, and yet no objections have ever been urged against the representation of the whole; he was therefore of opinion, that the petitions were ill founded, and that no alteration ought ever to take place.

Sir WILLIAM MILNER began with declaring, that he was not now influenced by any apprehension of danger; though, the distance of three months back, he would have urged the supposed danger against any proposition for reform: he had been then, indeed, a good deal alarmed, and, as he now believed, unnecessarily. He said he had been a friend to reform formerly, when that cause had been taken up by the county of York; and he would be glad, either now, or at any future time, to join again in that cause, if taken up by that county, and by the honourable Member for the county, Mr. Duncombe. He spoke in strong terms of the respectability of the petitioners, and of the Society of the Friends of the People; but said he could not give his vote at this time in favour of the motion. He could not do so for this reason, that he conceived the majority of the voice of the people to be decidedly against it; and the honourable gentleman (Mr. Grey) had himself stated, that laws must, to bind all, be consented to by all. He did not believe that any of the petitions on the table spoke the sense of the people; he was satisfied that any idea of reform was, at the present moment, against the sense of the people; and, for that reason, he must vote against the motion.

Mr. FRANCIS said, Mr. Speaker, I cannot but congratulate the friends of Parliamentary Reform, and the country in general, on the auspicious opening of this debate. The three gentlemen, who have spoken first this day, Members of Parliament as respectable in point of character and situation as any who sit here, and totally unconnected with any of the parties, by whom the present motion is supported, have declared themselves strongly, though generally, friends to the measure. I

receive the declarations they have so honourably made, as a pledge of their principles, and an omen of success. The two first of these gentlemen have doubts about the time. They think we ought to wait for a more favourable opportunity, when they shall be ready to concur with us. Undoubtedly it is for *them* to judge, at what period they will act. I wish them only to recollect that, when this measure was introduced last year we were at peace with all the world, and the country was allowed to be in flourishing circumstances. The question, put to us then, was, why are you not satisfied with the advantages you enjoy? Why should you wish to change or improve, when all is well, and when apparently the people are contented? That argument will not do now; but the enemies of reform have another in readiness to serve their present turn.— They have clothes for all seasons. Since last year, the state of the kingdom is completely reversed. We are involved in a foreign war, and this war is attended already with uncommon domestic calamities. *Is this a time to think of changes in the Constitution?* for so they are pleased to call every measure, that proposes to correct abuses, by reverting to principles. *Is this a time to disturb or agitate the minds of the people, or to weaken the hands of Government?* These gross contradictions ought to defeat one another. It is not fair to suffer such hostile and inconsistent arguments to act in concert, as they do, against one and the same measure. With respect to times and seasons, I shall only say that, to minds, unwilling to do right, all times are equally inconvenient and improper. To him, who dislikes the voyage, all the winds of Heaven are equally unpropitious. He looks for nothing but pretences to avoid it.— The honourable and worthy representative of Yorkshire*, has declared himself frankly, and without qualification or reserve. He says he is a friend to a Reform of Parliament now and at all times, because it is now as necessary and as safe as it can be at any other period. But, if the war be an immediate objection to the attempt, he trusts that objection will not last long, that it will not be permitted to subsist any longer to the ruin of the country. He considers the war, as I

* Mr. Duncombe.

do, as in itself a mischief enormous. But, when the authors of it, not contented with the calamities inseparable from war, make it a pretence for objecting to the only measure that can restore and preserve the Constitution, the only one that can prevent such ruinous wars in future, then indeed it is time to remove this pernicious obstacle out of our way, and put an end to this treacherous objection. The honourable Baronet, who spoke last, assures us that our ideas of correcting abuses are visionary and impracticable; that they are inconsistent with that corrupted state of manners and morals, which riches and luxury have introduced into the nation, that the country is too great a merchant to be honest, that we are too commercial for our virtues, and this he says in the House of Commons of Great Britain, in the presence of the representatives of the first commercial nation in the world; and this he says, while his own personal independence stands on the possession of a fortune derived from the very sources of industry and commerce. [*Here Mr. Francis was called to order by Sir William Young.*] I do assure the honourable Baronet, I had no thoughts of giving him offence. I shall therefore content myself with observing generally, what I am convinced is true, that commerce in itself, and conducted on its true principles, as it has been in this country, excepting always one spurious and dishonourable branch of it, has no tendency to corrupt or degrade the character of the people who are engaged in it; but that, on the contrary, by making them apply their faculties to active occupations, it keeps them out of vice, and that in proportion as commerce expands her operations, their real tendency is to enlarge, to enlighten, and to improve the mind. But, if the fact were otherwise, what conclusion would he draw from it? Would he have us abandon the resources of our trade? Would he risk the loss or diminution of those revenues, which alone can support the present war, in order to mend our morals? It may possibly be true, as he says, that we are too commercial for our virtues; but I am afraid that our present situation calls for every contribution, with which commerce can supply us, and that neither the virtues nor the resources of the landed interest will be sufficient to enable us to encounter the expences, the debts, and the distresses, which the present perni-

cious war is likely to bring along with it. But these incidental reflections have carried me too far from the question before us. It is time I should return to the purpose, for which I rose.

Sir, I voted against the adjournment last night, for other reasons, but principally because I was desirous of adverting to some passages in a very ingenious speech made by a right honourable friend of mine*, while they were fresh in my memory. However, as this is a continued debate, I believe I shall be strictly in order, in referring to what he said, as far as my memory will serve me. I know myself and him too well, to think of entering into a competition of any kind with my right honourable friend. Between him and me, a hostile contest, I am sure, can never happen. My intention is, not to provoke an unfriendly difference, but to solicit an amicable discussion, such as those with which he has often favoured me, on other subjects, and in happier times. If I should appear to question his judgement, to combat his opinions, or, in this single instance, and on this occasion only, to undervalue his eloquence, no man, I trust, will suspect me of the folly of pretending to an equality with him. The rank and qualifications of men should be measured by their pretensions. To imagination or eloquence, I have none. But I will not descend so low as to profess that I have no judgement, no judicial faculty whatever to examine or pronounce upon the genius and eloquence of others. It would be a poor affectation to stultify myself for the sake of a comparison in favour of any man.

I cannot follow my right honourable friend in the endless excursions of his rapid imagination. Sometimes he soars so high into the regions of the air, that it would require the eye and the wing of an eagle to pursue him. Then down he drops, with equal rapidity, from Heaven to earth, to the depths of the sea, and to the waters under the earth. I cannot fly, nor swim, nor dive as he does. But if, for a moment, he will condescend to restrain the præternatural activity of his mind, or reserve it for occasions, in which fancy ought properly to predominate over reason,—if he will descend from these altitudes, and meet us on plain level ground, for the purpose of discussing

* Mr. Windham.

a plain terrestrial question, not of abstract speculation, not of theories untried, but of practical prudence ; then, Sir, he shall find me as ready to be guided by his wisdom, as ever I have been to listen to his eloquence. On this subject, of all others, he is most strictly bound by his duties to satisfy my understanding. On the present occasion, in my judgement, he has not filled up the dimensions of his mind. He has been eloquent and brilliant ; but as to the purpose, and business, and duty of the debate, he has totally failed. On this head, I have many complaints to make of him ; but he may be sure that I shall never appeal against him to any man but himself. In the first place, then, I accuse my right honourable friend, in his own Court, of bad taste in the composition of some of his late speeches, particularly the last. Let the occasion, the subject, the argument, be what it may, he has but one way of treating it. War and peace, the repair of a turnpike, the better government of nations, the direction of a canal, and the security of the constitution, are all alike in his contemplation. The French revolution is an answer to every thing ; the French revolution is his everlasting theme, the universal remedy, the grand specific, the never-failing panacea, the perpetual burden of his song ; and with this he treats us from day to day ; a cold, flat, insipid hash of the same dish, perpetually served up to us in different shapes, till at last, with all his cookery, the taste revolts, the palate sickens at it. Has he no choice of topics ? Has he lost the fertility of his mind ? Are the sources of his imagination dried up or exhausted ? Has he no way of opposing a reform of corruptions and abuses in our own system, but by telling us incessantly what mischiefs have been done by madmen in another country, acting in circumstances totally differently from ours ! Has he no other way to convince and satisfy sober Englishmen, debating on a great and serious interest of their own, but by warning them against the folly and wickedness of the French ! Let me intreat my right honourable friend, if his wit and wisdom be fairly worn out in the service, to console us at least with a little variety. I know he is a privileged person. I know with what favour he is heard at present. Yet, after all, it is not generous in him to persecute, as he does, so patient an audience. But these are trifles. I have a heavier charge against my right honourable friend, of which he

himself shall be the judge; for the confidence I repose in his honour and in his virtue is unbounded. I accuse him of suppression of evidence in the very statement of his own favourite argument, of palpable partiality and injustice to us, to the French, and to himself. The eminence of his mind ought to give him a commanding view of every part of every subject, to which he applies it. If the French revolution be his theme, I expect it from his personal honour, I demand it from his justice, that he will bring the whole of the question impartially before us. I cannot suffer him to confine the comprehensive powers of his superior understanding to narrow imperfect views of so great a subject of meditation and instruction. I deny that there is any fair, any rational conclusion to be drawn from the circumstances of the French revolution to the situation of this country. The people of England neither want the warning nor the lesson. But let him state it so, if he pleases. Give us the example, but give it to us entire. Is it fair, is it honest, is it truly instructive, to insist upon the mischiefs, which the French revolution has produced, and to keep out of our sight the original enormous mischief, which produced the revolution? What use, what benefit, what lesson, am I to derive from a bare knowledge of the effect, if the cause of that effect be carefully concealed from me? Let him bring the case completely before us, and then I shall leave him at liberty to load whatever part of it he may think the most odious in the instance, or most dangerous in the example. He cannot paint to me the horrible crimes and calamities with which the French revolution has been attended, without carrying back my mind to the source and origin of those evils—to that infernal despotism, under whose rod a mild and generous people have been perverted into a nation of savages. Such was the school, the master, and the education. What scholars did he expect from it? If he states the premises fairly, and argues regularly from them, I care not to what length he carries the deduction; his conclusion must be mine. The fruit has been bitter indeed, and blasted be the tree that produced it! These are the grand comprehensive lessons, which I expected from the genius and wisdom of my right honourable friend. In me, it is no flattery, no compliment to acknowledge the intellectual superiority of his mind. He knows how little I value these advantages

in themselves. The abilities of eminent men are their weapons, not their merits: let us see what use they make of them. How has it happened, how was it possible, that of all the important reflections, suggested by the events which have happened in France, the only one really applicable to the instruction of those whom it concerns in this country, should have escaped him! I mean to state it in the form of a supposition only, and leave the inference to be drawn and applied by every man to his own use.

We have seen the consequence in France of driving a submissive people to the violent application of extreme remedies to extreme disorders. Let me ask my right honourable friend, or any man, who knows what the internal state of France was for a few years before the late convulsions, whether if, at any earlier period, suppose for example at the accession of Louis the Sixteenth, there had been wisdom and virtue enough in the constituted powers and orders of the kingdom, in the Ministers of the executive power, in the nobility, in the clergy, in the Parliaments, to have granted some reasonable, though moderate relief to the people, to have corrected some of the most intolerable abuses in the Government, to have surrendered some part of their own invidious, oppressive; and very often useless privileges with a good grace—whether, in that case, he does not think it probable that the ruin, which their obstinate adherence to the established system has brought on themselves, and on their country, would have been prevented? For myself I can affirm, that it is not possible for the human mind to feel, on such a subject, a conviction more decided and complete than I do, that, if the prudent concessions I allude to, had been made in time, the monarchy of France at this hour would have stood untouched, and that the hierarchy, the nobility, and the law, instead of being crushed and demolished as they have been, would have remained in their places unmoved, with no material diminution either of profit or splendor, and certainly with greater security than ever. They yielded at last, but at last it was too late. Upon *us*, I hope, the example of their conduct and its consequences will not be thrown away.

I have impeached the taste and justice of my right honourable friend. But I have another appeal to make to his personal spirit, which I know to be as high as belongs to any man.

Let me intreat him to consider, whether it be consistent with his character, to exhibit so much courage, where there is so little provocation or occasion for it. On the crimes committed in France it is an easy matter to enlarge : but to what purpose ? Who is there in this House to be convinced or converted on that subject ? He may flourish his sword in perfect safety on this ground, as all men may do, who have nobody to contend with. Certainly he will meet with no opposition, but on the contrary, the most hearty concurrence in me and every person with whom I have the honour of acting in this place. With all his imagination I defy him to conceive, with all his eloquence I defy him to express, a deeper sensation of disgust and detestation, than all of us have felt at the abominable scenes which have lately been exhibited at Paris.

My right honourable friend must now permit me to lay another instance of injustice to his charge—extraordinary indeed in its nature, though not very important in its effect ; and this shall be the last. The House have heard him, with every pleasure that belongs to astonishment, while he ranged over the whole circuit of human science, and glided through every region of the moral as well as the intellectual world ; through ethics, mechanics, pneumatics, hydraulics, geography, mathematics, astronomy, and logic ; through all the polite arts ; of swimming, flying, burning, skating, diving ; the learning of his library, and the meditations of his closet. On one subject alone he has studiously maintained a most delicate reserve. The unfortunate motion on your table, as far as I am able to recollect, has never been blest with a single moment of his attention. On the actual subject of the debate, you may find him every where but at home. One would have thought, Sir, that the power of invention could have added nothing to the curiosity of this proceeding. Other men, perhaps, with industry and resolution, might have stated the premises, and applied them to the question as accurately as he has done. But it was reserved for the genius of my honourable friend to discover a connection between those premises, and the conclusion he has drawn from them. After giving the House a specimen of his skill in every department of abstract science, of the depth of his theories and the extent of his speculations, without bestowing a single glance on the simple question, whether we shall

or shall not appoint a Committee to consider the petition, my honourable friend turns short upon us, and says, *look you, gentlemen, I am a plain practical man. I take things as they are. My opinions are founded on experience. It is you, philosophers, you theorists, you metaphycians, who have done all the mischief, and would do much more, if you were not counteracted by simple, solid, experimental understandings, such as mine!* I believe, Sir, I may venture to say, that a more noble instance, than this, of bold and vigorous incongruity, a more intrepid *disparate*, as I think the Spaniards call it, is not to be found in modern or ancient eloquence.

In the course of this debate some remarks have been made on the petition on your table, and some invidious inquiries about the persons, who have signed it. Allow me to answer them by stating the fact. Undoubtedly, Sir, if they, who have prepared this petition, had thought that the authority of numbers would be useful to strengthen the remonstrances it contains, or to enforce the prayer of it, they might easily have contrived to get it signed by many thousands. But, if they had done so, what would have been the consequence? We should immediately have been told, and I think with reason, *You have brought us a long, laboured, intricate representation, signed by multitudes, who could not possibly have read it, or known what they were signing.* Foreseeing this reflection, we have taken a wiser course. The petition is signed by a few; but by no man, who has not read it, who does not understand the contents, and is not convinced of the truth of it. The quality of the petitioners too, I presume, will be thought to entitle them to attention. It is not that I regard these factitious distinctions myself; but they, who do, may be assured that the majority of the petitioners I know, and all of them, I believe, are gentlemen who, in point of rank and fortune, are on a level with the generality of this House, and that, if I had not been precluded by my situation in Parliament, I should have been proud of signing it myself, and even have claimed it as the post of honour to have taken my station among the foremost in the list. I have no earthly personal interest in the success of the measure. On the contrary, the agitation of this question has been to me the source of infinite personal uneasiness; of coldness, distance, and separation in private life, where once the warmest friend-

ship and affection have subsisted ; but my heart and mind go with the measure, and, while there is hope, I never shall abandon it.

An honourable gentleman *, I think, observed last night, that, in fact, there was no occasion for so general a remedy as that which the petition aimed at. He did not deny that corruption existed in the election of the House of Commons ; but in part, he defended the practice as a thing tolerable in itself, and for the rest, he assured us, that the worst part of the abuses in question were gradually decreasing ; that, as the instances occurred, they would be successively corrected, and that, let the evil be what it would, this was the best way of removing it. That honourable gentleman will pardon me, if, with longer experience and observation of the subject, I differ from him about the fact. I affirm, with certain knowledge, that corruption has been for many years, and is in a state of progression ; that is, from the Revolution to this hour. How it stands now, I need not attempt to explain ; for I am in the company of those, who understand the subject as well as I do. But I beg leave to state to the honourable gentleman what the situation of parliamentary bribery and corruption was in this country about twenty years ago. The instance is curious and the authority unquestionable. I take it from a letter written by the late Earl of Chesterfield to his son, never intended to be made public, and unconnected with party views of any kind, even those of the time he lived in.

Extract of a letter from the Earl of Chesterfield to his son, dated December the 19th, 1767.

“ Since that I have heard no more of it, which made me look out for some venal borough ; and I spoke to a borough jobber, and offered five-and-twenty hundred pounds for a secure seat in Parliament ; but he laughed at my offer, and said that there was no such thing as a borough to be had now ; for the rich East and West Indians had secured them all, at the rate of three thousand pounds at least ; but many at four thousand ; and two or three that he knew, at five thousand.”

Perhaps it will be said, the times are mended. Sir, for myself I can only protest, that I have some reason to think

* Mr. Jenkinson.

otherwise. So far from any fall having taken place in the price of boroughs, I believe it never was higher than it has been lately, and that the most unfair advantages have been taken, by dealers and chapmen, of customers in particular situations.—I have heard of a worthy gentleman who, after having made his bargain for five thousand pounds, without being known to the other party, was charged six thousand as soon as his name was discovered, and merely because the proprietor of the commodity would not take less from an honest gentleman, who had existed in the East Indies. You will allow, Sir, that the worthy person I allude to was hardly treated in that affair.—I give you this instance, out of many, as a proof of the actual state of the abuse. You see, by Lord Chesterfield's letter, how the case stood twenty years ago. Do you seriously believe that the purity of borough mongers, and the morals of the electors of Great Britain, are mended since that time? that the commodity is not so scarce, or the demand for it not so considerable as it has been heretofore? On that point, I can give you nothing but my own opinion and conviction, and I shall give it to you now, in the solemn adopted language of Parliament, *that corruption has increased, is increasing, and ought to be diminished.*

The Earl of MORNINGTON said, that his objections applied to the whole spirit and substance of the measure which was the subject of this debate; but that he did not mean to complain of the particular form in which it had been introduced into the House. Every proposition containing a specific plan for altering the frame of Parliament, must involve many intricate questions of detail, and must lead to the consideration of a variety of complicated and minute provisions.—The discussion of such a detail had been sometimes supposed to offer the most advantageous ground of opposition, which could be desired by those who were determined to resist the introduction of all new projects of representation, and to maintain the constitution of Parliament on its old foundations.

For his part, he desired no such advantage in this argument: he rejoiced, that on this occasion no specific plan had been proposed, which, either by the number and variety of its defects, or by the plausible appearance of some subordinate parts, might divert the attention of the House from that great,

leading, and preliminary question, on which he was anxious, in the first instance, to fix the minds of those who heard him, "Is it necessary for the public good to make any alteration in the existing frame of Parliament?" The honourable gentleman (Mr. Grey) had held an open and a bold language, and his candour in that respect deserved acknowledgement: he had plainly avowed, that if a Committee should be granted, and if adequate remedies should be applied to the grievances alleged in the petition, the event must be "a change in the Government of the country." By a change in the Government, the honourable gentleman could not intend merely a change in the Administration: he was, undoubtedly, incapable of proposing to the Nation, to alter the whole order of the representation in Parliament, for a purpose so unworthy as that of transferring power from the hands of any party to those of another; he could not intend to pursue, by such means, an end comparatively so trivial.

His purpose, therefore, is something of a more serious and durable nature; it is to change, not the Administration only, but the very genius and spirit of the British Government; to separate those elementary principles of monarchy, of aristocracy, and of democracy, which are now mixed and blended in the frame of this House, and by combining them again, according to some new and different rule of proportion, to create a system, of which we at present know nothing more, than that it is to be new in its texture, and wholly different in its effect from the existing order of our happy constitution. A project so stated, and of such extent, has not been agitated in Parliament during the present century; and it is a duty which we all owe to the present and to succeeding times, to pause, and to deliberate with the utmost caution, before we consent even to take the first step towards a measure of such powerful effect, and of such lasting consequences. Before we part with those foundations on which the Government has been so long settled, it becomes us to recollect what that is which we are about to destroy, and to ascertain, as far as human foresight can enable us, what is likely to be substituted in its place.

Lord Mornington said he would state, as distinctly as he could, the several questions which occurred to his mind as necessary to be carefully examined in the earliest stage of this de-

liberation. In the first place, we ought to examine what is the nature, extent, and value of the practical benefits which the people actually enjoy under the present frame of Parliament? and whether they are so evidently unconnected with the present frame of Parliament, that an alteration of it could not possibly endanger their continuance? In the next place, what is the nature and extent of the practical grievances now alledged?—whether they can reasonably be imputed to any defect in the frame of Parliament—and if they can, whether they are of such weight and importance, as to overbalance the benefits actually enjoyed by the people? And lastly, is there a reasonable prospect that such a Government is likely to be substituted in the place of the present, as shall better secure the benefits actually enjoyed by the people, or afford a more certain and effectual protection against the grievances of which the petitions complain?

In considering the first question, no argument is necessary to persuade the House of the real existence of those eminent and substantial advantages which, for more than a century, have been universally felt, acknowledged, and understood, in this happy and flourishing nation. To enumerate them will be sufficient; and no man can hear them named without feeling a due sense of their value.

We know, that in many other countries a large share of political power has been directly exercised by the people. The form of all such Governments is, in the common acceptation of the word, free; but the practical result has often been the most odious and intolerable tyranny; and never, under any distribution of political power, of which the memory has reached us, or of which we now see the operation, have the true ends of society been so effectually accomplished, or so long preserved, as under that Government, which it is the professed design of this motion to change. Under that Government, the life of every individual is secured by the mild and equal spirit of the law; by the pure administration of justice; by the admirable institution of juries; and by the gracious and equitable exercise of that prerogative, which is the brightest ornament of the British Crown, the power of mitigating the rigour of criminal judgements, and of causing law and justice to be executed in mercy. Under that Government, the liberty of the subject is established on the same foundations, and protected by the same

safeguards, which maintain the whole system of order in the State ; it is a temperate and rational liberty, inseparably connected with all the most sacred duties of society, and while it adds new force to every civil, every moral, and every religious obligation, it derives from them its most powerful activity and its most substantial strength. Resting on such foundations, and united with all the virtues, and with all the genuine interests, both of the Monarch and of the People, it has long remained inviolate ; and it seems to contain every principle of stability, which can enter into the frame of any human institution ; for it can neither be abused by the subject, nor invaded by the Crown, without equal hazard to the safety of both ; without endangering some fundamental principle of private tranquillity and domestic comfort on the one hand, or without disturbing the harmony and impairing the vigour of the Monarchy on the other. Lord Mornington next spoke of the right of property, a right which, he said, was rendered sacred by the whole tenor of our laws, and was the basis of the constitution of Parliament.

These are the principal advantages which every subject of the realm now enjoys—the safety of his life, of his liberty, and of his property ; and surely these advantages will not be more lightly esteemed by a wise people, because they are become habitual by long and uninterrupted possession. They are, in fact, the true sources of the security, of the repose, and of the affluence of private life ; and therefore they may justly be deemed the efficient and immediate causes of all real happiness in society. These advantages are confirmed by a peculiar excellence in the practical effect of the present structure of Parliament. Whatever might be contended to be the defective state of the representation in theory, it is an undeniable fact, proved by daily, and almost by hourly experience, that there is no interest in the kingdom, however inconsiderable, which does not find some advocate in the House of Commons to recommend it to the attention of the Legislature. From the same sources are necessarily derived the wealth, the power, and the splendor of the Empire : it is the sense of safety, it is the confidence reposed in the protection of the Government, which have encouraged the subject to adventure the fruits of his industry and skill in those enterprises of agriculture, of commerce, and of manu-

factures, which, in the various stages of their progress, contribute equally to the profit of individuals, and to the prosperity of the State. From the united effects of all these circumstances, the collective interests of the empire have been in a progressive state of improvement ever since the period of the Revolution. Even during most of our wars, the advancement of trade, and general opulence, has not been interrupted, particularly during the war of 1756; in the course of which, the commerce of the nation was scarcely less prosperous than her arms. One unfortunate exception to this statement must be admitted—the American war. That war, (which, it had been already observed, was, in its origin, the war of the people) with every other calamity, undoubtedly produced a general stagnation in the sources of national prosperity.

In 1772, the value of the imports was	£.14,500,000
And that of the exports	17,700,000
They had sunk in 1782, to	£.12,700,000 imports,
and to	11,400,000 exports.

But whatever argument may be drawn from this period of disgrace and disaster, the rapid recovery of the country from the consequences of those misfortunes must not pass without remark.

From 1782 to 1791, the imports rose to	£.19,600,000
And the exports to	22,700,000
In 1792, they were	£.19,600,000 imports,
and	24,800,000 exports,

Decrease from 1772 to 1782,	} Period of American war.
Imports £.1,800,000	
Exports 6,300,000	

Increase from 1782 to 1792,	} Period since the peace.
Imports £.6,900,000	
Exports 13,400,000	

Increase of 1792 above 1772	- Imports £.5,100,000
	Exports 7,100,000

Thus, with all the imperfections and irregularities of this reprobated frame of Parliament, the nation has risen from the lowest state of humiliation and adversity,

“ More glorious and more dread than from no fall,”

“ And trusts herself to fear no second fate.”

What had been the means by which the nation had not only surmounted all her difficulties in so short a time, but had been enabled to appear again among the States of Europe with increased strength, and with augmented splendor?

During that period, no change of the system of representation had taken place. Whatever was effected by the reduction of the influence of the Crown, proceeded from the House of Commons, under its present Constitution. There was nothing to aid the country in that memorable struggle, but the intrinsic vigour of the Constitution itself, neither improved, nor impaired by any alteration; it was the wisdom of Parliament, supported by the uniform confidence and co-operation of the people, which had been found equal to the arduous task of retrieving the affairs of the Empire, in a crisis of such difficulty and distress, as perhaps had never before been overcome by any Empire, of which the memory remained among mankind. This example, therefore, of the American war, considered in all its parts, exhibits another important practical excellence in the existing frame of the Government. For it shews, that if the Constitution has not the power (and what human work can have the power?) to exempt us from every vicissitude of fortune, yet it contains an active principle, which, after the most severe calamities, enables the nation to recover her strength by a natural effort, and to repair all her losses from her own internal resources. Lord Mornington then said, he did not think he was called upon to prove, that all these advantages would necessarily be destroyed by any alteration in the present construction of the House of Commons. The weight of proof in this argument must be imposed on those who propose a change in the Government. It is incumbent on them to shew, that these inestimable blessings are not interwoven with that system, which they mean to disturb. It cannot be denied that these blessings have been coeval with the present frame of Government. We know that they can exist together; we do not know that they can exist separately. Their co-existence for so long a period will be a strong presumption of their being intimately connected, until some stronger proof can be adduced to the contrary. It is not, perhaps, within the reach of human wisdom to trace each of these happy effects (which every man feels) distinctly to its immediate cause, in

any one of the mixed principles of our Government, or in the specific proportion which those principles bear to each other, as they are now combined; but it is at least as arduous an undertaking to prove, (without a previous experiment) that any different temperature of the same principles would produce the same effects; happier effects cannot reasonably be expected, or desired, and it would be a most criminal rashness, to commit the happiness of a whole nation to the hazard of a perilous experiment, which, at best, does not even promise any practical improvement in the civil condition of the people. Even in a Constituent Assembly, deliberating with no other view than that of selecting the best possible system of government, without prejudice in favour of any doctrine, and without attachment to any institution, under every imaginable circumstance of advantage to the honourable gentleman's cause, what would be the determination of this argument? Let us suppose, that in a Constituent Assembly, the honourable gentleman were not merely to avow a design of changing the existing Government of his country, but were to propose in its place a new theory, more perfect than any which the human understanding ever before conceived, and to all appearance exempt from any of the irregularities of the British Constitution; his eloquence, and his ingenuity would certainly be applauded. But if, on the other side, some person were to rise, and to oppose to that beautiful theory, a Constitution, which, however irregular and anomalous in some of its parts, had realized to the people, for more than a century, every substantial benefit, which the honourable gentleman could hope to attain by the complete practical success of all his most sanguine speculations; would not even a Constituent Assembly, (in which wisdom and prudence had any influence,) adopt that constitution, which had been proved to be competent to all the ends of good Government, in preference to a theory, framed with a view to the same ends, but of which the practical operation was untried, and must therefore be uncertain? Having stated these considerations on that question, which he had proposed at the opening of his speech, as the first to be examined, Lord Mornington next adverted to the nature of the practical grievances alledged in the petitions, and proceeded to inquire whe-

ther they were to be imputed to the defective state of the fabric of Parliament.

The principal grievances enumerated were—The whole system of the wars in which the nation had been engaged; the debt in which it has been involved by those wars; and the taxes with which the people are burdened in consequence of the debt; and it is asserted, that these evils could never have existed, if the representation of the people in Parliament had been differently modelled. That war is at all times a great evil, and that our wars have been the original causes both of the National debt, and of the taxes, is a truth which cannot admit of dispute. But it is also true, that under certain circumstances, war may be justly demanded by the unanimous voice of the wisest nation, and may become of necessity even the systematic policy of the most prudent, moderate, and incorrupt councils. In order to substantiate the comprehensive charge exhibited by the petitioners against every Parliament which has sat since the revolution, it must be proved, that our wars since that time have generally been undertaken in contradiction both to the declared sense, and to the manifest interests of the people. But no man who is not intirely ignorant of our history, will hazard a proposition so false in all its parts. The peculiar situation and circumstances of this island engaged the nation for a long time in successive contests for the preservation of her Constitution, of her trade, and of her foreign dominions. The wars which immediately followed the revolution, were absolutely necessary for the security of that auspicious settlement. The recent establishment required protection, not only against the abdicated King, and those who supported his cause at home, or who had followed his fortunes abroad, but also against the pride and jealousy of Louis XIV. He could not suffer a limited monarchy, founded on the liberties of the people, to grow up, and flourish in peace so near his throne. He naturally foresaw that such a Constitution must become a continual reproach to the tyranny of his Government, and an insuperable obstacle to the progress of his ambition.—It was therefore his policy to attempt the destruction of so formidable a neighbour, by every means both of open force and secret machination; and under such circumstances, every motive of self-preservation, of justice, and of honour, required,

not only that the English nation should oppose a firm resistance to the direct attacks of this restless and implacable enemy, but that a systematic plan of offensive alliance, and of vigorous war, should be steadily pursued for the effectual reduction of his overgrown and dangerous power.

These wars, undertaken in such a cause, and with such views, were the original foundation of the national debt; and if it should be observed, that they were undertaken in opposition to the wishes of a numerous party in the nation, let it be remembered, that the same party was equally disaffected to the cause of our liberties, of our laws, and of our religion.

The wars in the reign of Queen Anne were directed to the great object of preserving the Crown in the Protestant line, and of insuring the accession of the illustrious family now on the throne. Since the happy accession of that family, the great increase of commerce, and the extension of our dominions in every quarter of the globe, have excited the jealousy of other powers: the nation has often been compelled to defend the freedom of her trade; and in contending for that object, it has been her fortune to extend her foreign possessions by large and valuable acquisitions of territory. The defence of those acquisitions has again induced the necessity of having recourse to arms. And unless it shall be maintained, that to preserve the principal sources of our commercial opulence, of our revenue, and of our naval superiority, was an unwise and unjustifiable object of war, the policy and justice of the wars undertaken by the Princes of the House of Brunswick can be as little contested, as it can be denied that the conduct and event of those wars have been glorious to the military character of this brave people.

Lord Mornington said, he would not fatigue the House by entering more particularly into the history of the wars since the accession of George the First; but he would assert generally, that many of them were wars of absolute necessity; all were undertaken with the concurrence, and most of them, not only in strict conformity to the interests, but at the earnest desire of the Public. Perhaps it would appear on a nearer view of the subject, that the most popular wars had also been the most expensive, and had generally terminated in the largest increase of the national debt.

Here, however, the case of the American war was again to be distinguished from the rest. That war, it was well known, was commenced with the public approbation. It was undertaken for the specious purpose of asserting a right in Parliament of compelling America to relieve the Mother country from a part of the burdens incurred in the defence of the colonies, during the justly popular war of 1756. Lord Mornington said, he was one of those who had always condemned the whole policy of the American war; but it was well known that the opinion of the nation at large was never decidedly expressed in favour of a peace, until the last year, or, at soonest, the year preceding the last, of that unfortunate contest.

For a period, therefore, of two years at most, he admitted, that a difference of opinion had existed between the Parliament and the nation. But would it be contended, that, according to the very first notion of a representative Government, a temporary opposition to the desires of the people might not sometimes be essential to their permanent interests? In this case, therefore, the objection could not be to the general principle of interposing the caution and prudence of a deliberative assembly between the passions and caprices of the people, and the final result of the public councils.

The abuse of this salutary principle, in the two last years of the American war, was not of such a nature, and had not produced such consequences, as to compel us, at this time, to expose the principle itself to hazard by an alteration in the Constitution: since the diminution of the influence of the Crown, which had been effected by Parliament, the same abuse was not likely to recur to any considerable extent; and against the injury which the country had suffered in the last two years of the American war, must be set the rapid recovery of the national wealth and force since the peace.—Here Lord Mornington referred to his former statement on this subject.—This view of the wars since the revolution, leads to a conclusion directly opposite to the intentions of the petitioners; for it shews (subject always to the exceptions stated on the case of the American war) that the Parliaments of those times, if they had been chosen even by the individual suffrage of every man in the nation, could not have pursued a more pacific system, without betraying the interests, and rejecting the sense of the people.

With respect to the debt, being the inevitable consequence of repeated wars, it stands on the same argument with them : It originated in the reign of William the Third, when the principles of the Constitution were supposed to flourish in full vigour. If, since that period, it has grown to an enormous size, the resources of the country have not only kept pace with it, but have greatly surpassed it, in every stage of its growth, and ultimately have afforded the means of providing for its gradual extinction.

Lord Mornington said, that he could not leave this part of the subject without observing, that the petitioners, who had placed the debt at the head of their list of grievances, had not taken the trouble of ascertaining the extent of the evil of which they complained ; for they had stated the debt at 280 millions, which was an addition of about 40 millions to its real amount.

The petitioners appeared to be still more ignorant of the nature and amount of the taxes, which they represented as so burdensome to them. In the first place, they had stated the taxes at 20 millions, instead of 17. In the next place, they had entirely omitted to make any allowance for the very considerable augmentation of revenue, which had been the necessary effect of the increase of trade. A large sum, which they had placed to the account of increased burdens, as if they themselves suffered under them, arose, in fact, from no additional burden whatever ; but from the increased produce of the existing taxes, in proportion to the extension of our commerce, and to the progressive wealth of the nation. After what had been stated on the wars and debt, it only remained to be inquired, with regard to the taxes, whether they were imposed in such a manner as to bear more heavily on the people than the necessities of the state required? Whoever examined the different branches of the revenue, must acknowledge, that the prevailing principle throughout the whole system of our taxation was to relieve the lower orders of the community, as much as possible, from the weight of the public burdens, and to throw it on those who were best able to support it.

He concluded this part of the argument, by remarking, that the choice of the particular moment for proposing to change the Government, on account of the debt and taxes, had not been very happy. The proposition had been started by those

who now bring it forward, precisely at the time, when, by the operation of a law, passed within these few years, Parliament had been enabled to redeem ten millions of the public debt, and had actually commenced a plan for the gradual diminution of the public burdens, by taking off some of those taxes, which pressed most severely on the indigent and laborious classes of the people. To swell the catalogue of grievances exhibited by the petitioners, much labour had been employed in the debate. Amongst other charges (to most of which sufficient answers had been given already,) it had been asserted, that from the defects in its constitution, and their consequences, this House had lost the confidence of the people. Lord Mornington said, he really could not understand to what moment within the period of these last nine years this complaint could consistently be applied by the gentlemen opposite to him. He had heard from those gentlemen, during almost the whole of that eventful period, a language totally different. He had heard them uniformly complain, that the support which this House had received in the nation, on the most momentous and trying occasions, was to be imputed to an universal delusion, which had spread over the whole kingdom, and had corrupted the judgment of the whole people. The confidence of the people in this House had not hitherto been denied, but it had been lamented as a fatal error: whether the people were really in the wrong on all those important occasions, or whether the gentlemen on the opposite side had contended that the people were in the wrong, merely because they happened to differ with them in opinion, is a question foreign to this argument.—

The fact that this House had met with the cordial support of the people during that period, could not be contested. Has any event happened of late, from which it can be collected that the people now repose a less degree of confidence in this House? Can it be collected, from the almost unanimous zeal with which they have so lately defended that Constitution, of which the frame of Parliament forms a most material part? Can it be collected from their cordial and vigorous co-operation in every measure which has been taken by Parliament, to resist the designs of France? Is it in the bounties to seamen and soldiers, or in the subscriptions for the maintenance of the widows and children of those who may fall in battle, that we

are to seek for the symptoms of a general disaffection to the existing Government, and of that spirit of jealousy and suspicion with which it is said all the proceedings of this House are observed by the nation?

Another grievance had been discovered by a learned gentleman (Mr. Erskine), which, Lord Mornington said, he rather mentioned for the singular ingenuity of the discovery, than as thinking it merited a serious answer. The learned gentleman had traced the origin of the French revolution, with all its errors, follies, and crimes, to the vitious constitution of the British House of Commons. The honourable gentleman who had just sat down (Mr. Francis) entirely disagreed with the learned gentleman; for he had told us that the French revolution, with its dreadful consequences, must be imputed solely to the despotism and corruption of the ancient monarchy of France.

Leaving those gentlemen to adjust their contradictory opinions, in all probability the events which had happened in France would not, in any view of them, be deemed an argument for changing the Government of Great Britain.

Thus stands the account between the benefits enjoyed under the present frame of Government, and the evils imputed to it. When the balance was struck, Lord Mornington said, he believed the House could not think that any change was necessary either for the ends of private happiness, or of public prosperity.

It still remained to be examined, what might be expected in the room of the present Government, in the event of a change?

Nothing having been distinctly stated on this head, excepting that a change is to be made, we seem at the first view to be left entirely to the uncertainty of conjecture on this most important of all the civil concerns of mankind. Perhaps this state of doubt and ignorance would be alone a sufficient objection to the motion; no wise and prudent man would commence the demolition of an established Government, under which he had lived happily and prosperously, without some knowledge of the system to be raised on its ruins, without some opportunities of comparison and of examination.

But the argument need not be rested on this ground. The candour of the honourable gentleman, and the indiscreet zeal of the petitioners, have given us the means of forming a tolerably accurate notion of the exchange which is likely to be offered to us in the Committee. If the honourable gentleman has not told us what he means to propose in the place of the present Government, he has distinctly avowed what he prefers to it. He has declared, that if he were to be compelled to make an option between the present Government, and that project, commonly called universal representation, (or the extension of the right of suffrage to every male adult in the kingdom) he has declared, that, reduced to such an option, he would not hesitate to adopt that strange and extravagant project. Whatever other plan he may have formed in his own breast, it is evident that he is prepared, under certain circumstances, to admit the plan of universal suffrage.

The question, therefore, arises, whether it is not probable that he may be driven to that very alternative in which he has already anticipated his own decision?

There is every reason to believe, that the great mass of the nation would reject any proposition, however framed, which was professedly designed to effect a change in the present Government of the country. The honourable gentleman is, therefore, reduced to the necessity of looking for support among the few, who have declared their discontent under that Government: his whole strength is in their numbers; and he must frame his plan of alteration in conformity to the favourite maxims of the majority of his supporters.

Of all the petitions on the table, he has selected one only, as deserving the consideration of a Committee. That petition is expressed with caution, but it is signed by fewer names than any other on the table, and is avowedly the production of the society of gentlemen associated under the title of the "Friends of the People." It cannot seriously be intended wholly to pass by all the other petitions; to treat them as utterly unworthy of notice; and to rely on this single petition as being sufficient of itself to justify a change in the Government, and to decide the principles by which that change shall be regulated: if such should be the intention, the majority of the petitioners will

probably be as little satisfied with the new project, whatever it may be, as they are with the present Constitution.

It is therefore reasonable to argue, from the general tendency of all the petitions ; and it is just to conclude, that whatever is the prevailing doctrine of representation, in which most of them concur, between that doctrine and the existing frame of Parliament the honourable gentleman must ultimately make his option.

Those petitions, which bear so striking a resemblance to each other, seem at the first view to have an air of moderation : but they all agree in maintaining it to be “ an undisputed principle of the Constitution, that the third estate ought to be elected by the Commons of the kingdom, or by a majority thereof.” These expressions, taken in the latitude in which they are here used, must be understood to comprehend every individual, or at least a majority of all the individuals in the kingdom, without any limit or distinction of property.

In the first sense, the doctrine requires no comment ; it is in plain terms the principle of universal suffrage, asserted in its utmost extent. The words, “ or by a majority thereof,” cannot reasonably be deemed a limitation of the first part of the proposition : for it is impossible to imagine any point, where a boundary can be correctly drawn between a right in the majority of the whole people, and a right in the whole people to exercise the elective franchise.

It may be remarked in passing, that no trace whatever of this principle, which the petitioners call “ undisputed,” is to be found in the whole history of the constitution of Parliament. The elective franchise, at no period, has been absolutely vested either in the people at large, or in the majority of them ; it has been distributed at all times according to some principle of selection ; in some instances regulated by property, in some by other considerations, but never by a mere numerical division of the individuals of the nation. Such is the doctrine on which those who profess to be the most moderate class of the honourable gentleman’s supporters, desire to place the structure of Parliament. The next class speaks a less guarded language.

The petitioners from Derby tell us, that “ they are assured, upon the most mature reflection, and diligent inquiry, that the

present system of representation is contradictory to the rights of man."

The petition from Sheffield, (which, although not on the table, may justly be considered, in this branch of the argument, as a leading part of the honourable gentleman's support) declares, that "men, and not houses or land, are the objects of representation."

A petition has been presented by the honourable gentleman who spoke last (Mr. Francis), "from sundry inhabitants of London, Westminster, and their vicinity," which deserves peculiar attention. It sets forth, "that, according to the established maxim of all good Governments, every man ought to be, in some measure, his own legislator; and it concludes, by recommending as the only effectual, permanent, and practicable plan of reform, that the right of voting should be restored universally to every man, not incapacitated by nature for want of reason, or by law for the commission of crimes; and that elections should be annual."

It is not immaterial to trace from what quarter this extraordinary petition has proceeded. At the head of the signatures stands the name of *Thomas Hardy*, a name obscure in this country, but not unknown to the National Convention of France. In the month of November, Thomas Hardy, Secretary to the Corresponding Society, on behalf of that Society, subscribed an address to the Convention, which breathed so sincere an affection for the cause of the French Republic, and so warm a zeal for the destruction of the British Government, as to obtain the honour of being circulated throughout all the departments, and all the armies of our enemy. It is remarkable, that for some time past, a public invitation has appeared, in the name of the Corresponding Society, encouraging all persons to sign a petition for a radical reform in the House of Commons. Combining these circumstances, can it be doubted, that this petition is the fabrication of the Corresponding Society? And can any man, who has observed the proceedings of that society, believe, that the deluded persons who compose it will rest satisfied with any temperate reform? or that they would be contented even with the full execution of the extravagant project recommended in their own petition, if they were not persuaded, that the accomplishment of that measure

must lead to consequences of infinitely greater extent than any of the absurdities, however numerous and extensive, with which the very first view of such a system must strike the most superficial observer? The origin and tendency of this petition, and the circumstances by which it is distinguished, must naturally draw the observation of the House to the most numerous, the most active, and the most formidable class of friends to the cause in which the honourable gentleman is engaged: These are the several societies, whose dangerous doctrines have lately attracted so much of the vigilance of Parliament, and have excited such just alarm and indignation in the country. In this House, gentlemen have uniformly contended, that these societies have nothing in view but the innocent object of improving the representation of the people. They are known to the honourable gentleman merely as Parliamentary Reformers; under that disguise they have tendered him their support. But they are known in another character to the people at large, whom they have attempted to corrupt, and to the Magistrates, whose peculiar duty it is to watch over and restrain all disturbers of the public peace: they are known to have openly professed, and assiduously propagated, doctrines tending not only to alienate the affections of His Majesty's subjects, from his person, family, and Government, but to taint every principle, by which the order of civil society is rendered permanent, or even practicable among mankind. They are known to have applauded the example, to have solicited the alliance, and to have received the caresses of the National Convention of France, and to have fought the establishment of a National Convention in Great Britain. The zeal, which is universally professed by every one of these societies in the cause of Parliamentary Reform, is merely subsidiary to the great object of introducing their favourite maxims in the most advantageous shape: a change in the system of representation is not the real end of their efforts, but is pursued, as affording the most favourable means of facilitating that total subversion of the monarchy itself, which will ever appear impracticable, even to the most adventurous and misguided zeal, while the Constitution of Parliament shall remain unimpaired.

This last description of the friends to a change in the Government, will undoubtedly acquiesce even in a plan of re-

form, which shall proceed no farther than to extend the right of voting to every man in the kingdom ; but the honourable gentleman cannot hope to appease these societies, even for a moment, by any proposition of a more limited nature. Thus we see, that of all the honourable gentleman's supporters, (excepting the Friends of the People, who have expressed no opinion on this part of the subject) not one is likely to be satisfied with any project of representation less extensive than that of universal suffrage, while many look even beyond that project, and regard it only as the beginning of more effectual mischief, and of more general confusion.

This view of the tempers, characters, and opinions, which the honourable gentleman must consult in the arrangement of his plan of reformation, opens a most alarming prospect of the principles by which the settlement of the new Government is likely to be directed : a closer investigation of the collateral circumstances of the case will only tend to increase our anxiety, and to confirm our apprehensions. At the close of the last session of Parliament, we were encouraged to expect that the honourable gentleman, and his own society, might have had sufficient influence to restrain within some bounds of moderation the extravagance of these wild and mischievous doctrines, or that wherever they might fail in restraining such doctrines, at least they would carefully abstain from all intercourse with those who continued to profess them. The authority of a single, and not a very numerous society, exercised with the utmost sincerity, and even with success in particular instances, must, however, have proved a weak and ineffectual barrier against that rash and arrogant spirit of innovation, from which the principal danger was to be apprehended ; more especially, when the very title and institution of such a society must have perpetually counteracted the efficacy of its precepts, by encouraging general discontent, and by giving a respectable sanction and a specious pretext to every turbulent and seditious disposition in the nation. Weak and ineffectual as such a security would be, we cannot flatter ourselves that we possess even that precarious advantage.

The correspondence of the Friends of the People, as far as is published, (connected with other transactions) affords abundant proof, that, whatever may be their good disposition, they

can neither effectually repress the violence of their followers, nor wholly avoid connections, of which they themselves acknowledge the dangerous tendency. In May 1792, the people of Sheffield address a letter to the Society, requesting its advice, countenance, and protection, and styling it "their leader and director in the great and necessary business of reform." The Society, as might be expected, return an answer fraught with the most wholesome admonitions, and containing the soundest maxims of prudence and discretion. The Society "counsels the people of Sheffield to observe a wariness and caution in all their language; because, as the Society remarks, wary and cautious language is the genuine characteristic of moderate views." The Society warns its pupils of the dangers which attend "ardent indiscretion;" and concludes "by congratulating them and the country on the *intrepid moderation* which is to be expected from them in future."

The fruits of these excellent lessons we have seen in the petition from Sheffield; which, for the indecency of its language, was justly rejected by the House. The doctrines maintained in the body of that petition have been already stated, and must be admitted to bear stronger symptoms of "ardent indiscretion," than of wariness or caution." No part of the petition carries the least appearance of "moderation;" but the petitioners have not wholly disappointed the expectations of their leaders and directors; in their very preamble, they take care to appear sufficiently "intrepid;" for they impeach the title under which the House sits as a branch of the Legislature; and they deny that we are, "in the just sense of the words, the Commons of Great Britain in Parliament assembled."

This is the only instance, as far as can be collected from the printed proceedings of the Friends of the People, in which the influence of their admonitions upon the minds of their followers has been put to the proof; and in this instance it has been found of no weight. Among the advantages held forth to the Public by this Society, at the time of its institution, we were assured, that its utmost efforts would be employed to raise a standard, to which none but moderate men could resort, to discountenance, and to reject all communication with those of a different description; and by these means to counteract the operation of the delusive and destructive principles contained

in the writings of Mr. Paine. Their endeavours to accomplish these objects have been peculiarly unfortunate. In May 1792, the Society for Constitutional Information addressed a letter to the Friends of the People, exhorting them "to cast away all aristocratic reserves, and to contend honestly and fairly for the people's rights in their full extent, if they hoped to grapple successfully with the powerful despotism to which they were opposed."

This language seems to have been properly understood by the honourable gentleman and his friends. In their answer, after several animadversions on the various resolutions and proceedings of the Constitutional Society, particularly on those in which an approbation of the doctrines of Mr. Paine had been expressed, they conclude with these words: "We must beg leave to decline all future intercourse with a society, whose views and objects, as far as we can collect them from the various resolutions and proceedings which have been published, we cannot help regarding as irreconcilable with those real interests, on which you profess to inform and enlighten the people."

From the day on which this answer is dated, to the end of the autumn, the Constitutional Society continued to "inform and enlighten the people, in the same spirit, and with increased assiduity, by diffusing and recommending the doctrines of Mr. Paine, and the example of France. In the month of November, Mr. John Frost and Mr. Joel Barlow, being invested with a diplomatic character by their brethren of this society, presented at the bar of the National Convention of France, that memorable address, which has been so justly reprobated by every loyal subject in this kingdom. In delivering their credentials, these Ambassadors pronounced a speech, in which they expressed a full confidence, "that in a short space of time, congratulations would be received by a National Convention in England." Among many remarkable passages, the address contains a most elevated panegyric on "the glorious victory of the 10th of August;" a day, carefully distinguished from the 2d of September, by those enlightened judgements which have deliberately estimated the comparative merits of those inhuman massacres; a day, however, which differed in no essential circumstance from the 2d of September, excepting

that on the 10th of August, (according to most accounts) more blood was shed, and it was the blood of faithful servants, engaged in the discharge of a lawful duty, and in the defence of the person and family of a lawful Sovereign. On the 10th of August, a limited Monarch was violently deposed from his throne, and (to complete the triumph of that glorious victory) was soon afterwards committed to a prison, which was never opened to him, until the time arrived when he was exposed to the insult of a pretended trial, and led forth, in the face of his subjects, to suffer an ignominious death.

To court the alliance of an usurpation, established on such crimes, to dignify the success of such crimes with the name of a glorious victory, and to express an expectation that a similar usurpation might soon be established in this country, was a conduct and a language which not only indicated "objects and views utterly irreconcilable with the real interests of the people," but an entire disregard of every feeling which adorns the British character. If, therefore, in the month of May, the honourable gentleman and his Society thought it necessary to disclaim all intercourse with the Constitutional Society, it might reasonably be supposed, that the events of the month of November would have rendered all communication between them absolutely impossible.

But in the month of November a new and very different description of Societies arose; those Associations, which, founded on the general sense of present happiness; on the fear of change, which naturally accompanies that sense; on the steady loyalty, and on all the moral and religious duties of a free and virtuous people, have contributed in a great measure to avert the dangers, which at that time threatened the very being of the constitution in Church and State. One great object of these Associations was to bring to justice, by regular process of law, and by the verdict of a jury, the authors and propagators of seditious doctrines, and particularly to check the circulation of Mr. Paine's libels, and to counteract their mischievous effects. In its principle, this object seemed to accord precisely with the professions of the Friends of the People: yet strange as it may appear, at this critical juncture, the Friends of the People actually coalesced with many leading characters in the Constitutional Society, under the new title of "Friends to the liberty

of the Press," for the avowed purpose of censuring these laudable associations, and of defeating the efforts of their honest and well-directed zeal. It is not meant to insinuate that the honourable gentleman and his friends, by this junction, adopted the general objects and views of those persons, whom they had before so wisely disclaimed; but it cannot be denied, that they consented to admit those persons to act in common with them in pursuing the particular objects of the new institution; and above all, in defeating the measures of the associations against republicans and levellers. Mischievous as the effects of such an union must be, even if they could be limited to the professed objects of this new society, the evil does not stop there:

Any degree of credit, which the persons described may be supposed to derive from the countenance of the honourable gentleman in this joint pursuit, will be turned by them to their own separate purposes, and will be applied to promote their own boundless projects of innovation and disorder. If, under the shelter of the honourable gentleman's character, they should grow into authority and strength, they may in the end compel him to lend his name and his talents to measures, not less fatal to his own interests, than to those of his country. While he avows it to be his fixed intention (even in the extreme case which he has stated) to change the existing Government of the country, his endeavours to disengage himself from any enemy to that Government of any description, must be, as they have been, vain and fruitless.

All the enemies of the British Constitution will cling to him, in spite of his efforts to shake them off, until their hatred of the present establishment shall have been completely satiated in the ruin of the state, in the misery, and perhaps in the blood, of all ranks and orders of the people—

"Non missura cutem nisi plena cruoris hirudo."

Lord Mornington contended, from all these considerations, that the plan of universal suffrage, connected with the principles of the French revolution, was that which was most likely to be substituted in place of the present system of representation: before he spoke of the practical effects of such a plan, he warned the House, that this notion of extending the elective franchise to every male adult in the kingdom, was by no means the ex-

treme limit of the speculative principle of right, in which it had originated ; on the same principle is founded a theory infinitely more extensive, and at least equally practicable :

This curious theory is to be found in a treatise, entitled, " The Social Contract," written by J. J. Rousseau ; a work no otherwise worthy of attention, than that it is known to be the fountain head from which the principles of the French revolution have been derived.

The original principle of right on which the system of universal suffrage rests, is usually expressed in this proposition, " No man ought to be bound by laws to which he has not consented, either in person, or by his representative."

The author of the Social Contract maintains, that the National will or Sovereignty of the people cannot be represented at all ; that every law which has not been ratified by the people *in person*, is null and void in its nature ; that the people of England are never in a state of freedom, excepting when they are in the very act of exercising the elective franchise ; and that they become slaves the moment a general election is concluded ; and finally, that every Government by representation is, in its nature, a tyranny, however extended the right of suffrage may be, because the national will, or, in other words, the vote of every individual, is not directly consulted in every act of legislation.

Having established these fundamental maxims of his theory, the author meets with a practical difficulty of some importance : a people consisting entirely of legislators, would not find much leisure for any other affairs than those of the State. Such a nation must, in the first instance, renounce all the arts and improvements of civilized society ; it must renounce every pursuit of commerce, of trade, and of manufacture, together with the whole system of political economy in all its branches, by means of which, the modern states of the world have been enabled to rise to public opulence and prosperity, and to augment and diffuse all the conveniencies of private life. But all these are deemed by the author to be sacrifices of no moment ; —poverty is a republican virtue—and in the opinion of those who know how to form a just estimate of things, the gain would be considerable to every individual, who should exchange his industry, his skill, his affluence, and his ease for a portion

of the national sovereignty, the exercise of which, however barren and unprofitable in all other respects, is always grateful to the ruling passions of vanity and ambition. But these are not the only obstacles to the institution of this incomparable republic. It is evident, that where the whole people were called from hour to hour to the senate, to discharge the dignified duties of legislation and Government, their domestic concerns, and the ordinary labours of agriculture, must also stand still: the ground could not be cultivated; food could not be provided; and these proud and generous republicans, in a state of perfect freedom, would want the common necessities of life, and be exposed to all the calamities of indigence and famine.

The author of the Social Contract fairly confesses, that he despairs of seeing these obstacles surmounted by the degenerate citizens of the modern world, in whose minds, (he says) the genuine ardor of liberty has been utterly extinguished by the busy spirit of commerce, by the desire of gain, and by the love of convenience. But in order to shew that his plan is perfectly practicable among wise and virtuous men, he recommends, with the utmost zeal, the admirable expedient, by which the ancient republics of Greece contrived to reconcile the full enjoyment of natural rights, with the possibility of natural existence. The people of Greece, he says, transacted all public business in person; they were all assembled from morning till night in the public forum; they were not greedy of gain; their sole occupation was the care of their liberty; and all the menial offices of their Houses, and all the labours of the field, were performed for them by slaves.

Here then (Lord Mornington said) is the only practicable arrangement, by means of which the Corresponding Society can be gratified with the sight of that "good Government whose established maxim it is, that every man should be his own legislator." Here the petitioners from Derby may see the rights of man carried to the extreme point of perfection; and both may learn, that according to their own principles, strictly and fairly pursued, civil slavery is the only solid basis of true political liberty.

This is the natural course of all those who attempt to raise Constitutions of Government on visionary speculations of ab-

abstract and indefinite right. They commence their career with some specious and plausible theory in view, but in endeavouring to pursue it, they are continually driven from difficulties in practice to contradictions in principle, and they find no resting place, until they have reached some monstrous and insurmountable absurdity: from thence they are compelled to tread back their steps, and to seek the real substance of liberty, where alone it is to be found, within the just limits of expediency and experience.

However extravagant and ridiculous the passage quoted from the Social Contract may appear to the House; for such speculations on the nature of Government, connected as they necessarily are with the most profligate maxims of immorality and irreligion, J. J. Rousseau has been canonized by the people of France, and is now one of the few saints remaining on their calendar. Their admiration of his works, and their reverence for his memory, have not been inactive: they have imitated with the utmost success his systematic dishonesty and his zealous impiety; and they have neither been less earnest, nor less successful in establishing his principles of political anarchy on the most permanent foundations, and in securing their full operation by the most effectual provisions.

They began by extending the basis of their new system of representation upon abstract principles of right: their next step was the admission of every male adult to the right of voting in some stage of the election of national deputies; and they are now advancing rapidly to the final completion of these doctrines, by submitting to the direct interference of every individual citizen in every act of legislation and Government.

In endeavouring, therefore, to form some notion of the practical effects of the plan of universal representation, it is impossible not to advert to the example of France; because in France that plan has been reduced to practice, and an experiment actually has been made of its consequences; and because the French Government, and their English abettors, have invariably concurred in an anxious wish for our adoption of that plan, as leading inevitably and speedily to the same consequences in Great Britain. Under such circumstances, it is in vain that the honourable gentleman who has just sat down,

has laboured to exclude from this debate any reference to the situation and conduct of France, and has rejected the whole of that subject as a stale and forgotten topic : although questions of great magnitude and importance have engaged the attention of the House since the affairs of France have been the immediate subject of deliberation, the honourable gentleman will find, that a topic, leading to such serious reflections, and furnishing such useful lessons, has not been so soon effaced from the memory of this House, or of the country : the business of this day must revive every passage of those transactions with the most direct and forcible application to the present question. It will be pressed home to the recollection and to the feeling of every British subject, that a change in the existing Government (the avowed object of this motion) was the great revolutionary machine, by the working of which, our enemies trusted to have reduced this happy people to the level of their own miserable condition. .

“ Commemoratio illius sceleris intermissa est, non memoria deleta, dum genus hominum, dum populi Romani nomen exstabit, (quod quidem erit, si per illos licuerit, sempiternum) illa pestifera intercessio nominabitur.”

While the independent rights of nations, while the order of civil society shall be held dear and valuable among mankind ; while the genius and spirit of the British constitution shall endure, (and long will they endure, unless destroyed by some rash and vain project of pretended reformation) that pernicious attempt of a foreign Power to interfere between the Government and the People, and, by that interference, to subvert at one blow all the bulwarks of our domestic happiness, and of our external strength, shall never be forgotten : it shall be remembered with the just sense of abhorrence and indignation which must ever attend the memory of that execrable design, and with the gratitude due to the united wisdom and loyalty of the British people, by which that execrable design was disappointed of its effects : recollecting as well the nature of our recent danger, as the means of our happy deliverance, we shall best repay our debt of gratitude to the people, by endeavouring to preserve entire that Government, which is the deserved object of their affection, and by cultivating in their minds a rational estimation of its excellence and value. With this view,

Lord Mornington said, he had already enumerated the practical advantages of our present situation; with the same view, he meant to contrast those advantages with the practical effects of that plan of representation, which, he had shewn, we must expect, if we consented to a change; and he hoped to prove the miserable error of those who imagine, that by infusing a greater portion of the spirit of democracy into the frame of Parliament, they are likely to give additional security to the good, of which they cannot deny the existence, or to provide against any one of the evils on which they ground their complaints. What has been the operation of the system of universal suffrage in France, upon the security of life, of liberty, and of property?

It seems to be the only object of their criminal laws, to afflict and to destroy every individual who can, by any means, be brought within their reach. Indefinite and constructive crimes, summary modes of trial, arbitrary convictions, and disproportioned punishments, are the leading features of that sanguinary code: at an early period of the revolution, the very principle of mercy was formally extinguished in their judicial proceedings: in place of the gracious mercy of the Crown, the populace have assumed the exercise of a new species of appellate jurisdiction, in cases of life and death: if, by accident, an unpopular criminal has the fortune to escape the severity of the law, the proceeding is reversed by the mob; the judges are compelled to return to the seat of judgement, and, under the terrors of assassination, to arraign a second time, for the same crime, the person who has been already legally acquitted by the judgement of the same tribunal. For it is now a received and applauded maxim of that democratic Government, "that the vengeance of the people ought to supply the weakness of the penal laws."

In short, no tyranny was ever suffered by mankind, in which so little account was taken of the effusion of human blood.

That which is called liberty, by a gross abuse of the term, is nothing better than a state of general disorder and confusion, accompanied with the most frequent and outrageous violations of personal freedom. It is, indeed, true, that the restraints of law and of authority have no longer any force,

and that no obligation remains to bind men to the discharge of any duty, moral, civil, or religious: but as every individual is equally free from these irksome restraints and duties, it is become the interest of every man to seize the first opportunity of violating the rights of his neighbour, and no man can possess any kind of security for his own.

The whole revolution was originally founded on the ruins of the right of property. Property is therefore rejected with scorn and indignation from the Constitution of the Legislature. So far from being respected as a sacred right, it is publicly held up to the detestation of mankind, as an odious usurpation on the rights of nature. All sects and factions seem to have agreed, that it should be treated by the Legislature, by all the constituted authorities of the republic, and by the whole body of the people, as a common prey, and a common object of persecution.

The natural result of these disorders has been to realize almost all the inconveniences of the imaginary republic of J. J. Rousseau; to suspend trade and industry, to render the annual supply of productive labour inadequate to the sustenance of the people, and to subject them to the most urgent distress, from the scarcity of provisions, and of other articles of ordinary consumption.

The collective opulence of the state is utterly ruined, and with it, all the permanent sources of public strength: but in the first moments of this convulsion, while the pressure of poverty and famine renders war the necessary policy of the Government, the same cause furnishes the means of carrying on hostilities; armies spring from the very calamities of the country; and the state is at once enabled and compelled to send forth innumerable multitudes to the war, who can find neither employment nor bread at home. Here the House may observe whether the new doctrines of Government tend to prevent or alleviate the great evils of war, debt, and taxes. It has been said in this House, that "war is the passion of States;" it might have been added, that it is more especially the ruling passion of those states, in whose constitution the spirit of democracy is predominant; in all times, such states have been most infected with the vanity of conquest, and most liable to the impulse of irregular ambition:

But under the principles of universal representation, the Government of France has far surpassed every example of those inordinate passions, which appears in history.

Without any other necessity than that which arose from their own internal situation, and which must be attributed to the vice of their new Constitution, the French have involved all Europe in a general war. They have deduced the pretences of that war by a most singular train of reasoning from the principles of their own Government.

Their first proposition was, that the sovereignty of every nation resided essentially in the people at large of that nation.—From thence they drew a most extraordinary inference, that, for the present, the people of France were the only legitimate representatives of all the nations in the world ; and therefore, during their temporary exercise of the assumed sovereignty of the Universe, every Government founded on principles not exactly conformable to those of the French Republic, must be treated by France as an usurpation and a tyranny, and the people who submitted to it must be considered as rebels and traitors. On these grounds, they declared war against all the Governments on earth, in the name and on the behalf of all mankind ; and they published their resolution of reducing to a state of perfect freedom, by force of arms, every refractory people, who should dare to cherish a sentiment of gratitude, veneration, or affection for their ancient institutions, or of allegiance for their lawful Prince.

The pride, the honour, and the interest of every State in Europe were thus wantonly challenged to defend their independent rights of internal sovereignty ; and the consequence has been, that France is now attacked on all sides by almost every Power, either naval or military, in Europe.

This instance proves, that the admission of every male adult in the realm to a voice in the election of the Legislature, is not a certain and infallible mode of establishing a pacific system of foreign politics.

With respect to debt, the enormous expence of this improvident and unjustifiable war exceeds all bounds of calculation ; it has seldom fallen short of ten millions sterling in each month since the commencement of hostilities, and it

must increase with the increasing force of the enemy, and particularly since the accession of the maritime powers. In addition to this ruinous source of expence, the augmentation of the ordinary establishments, the mismanagement of the revenues, and the unbounded speculation practised in every department of the Administration, have caused such a waste of public money, as surpasses infinitely the effects of the united extravagance and corruption of all the most prodigal Monarchs that ever sat on the throne of France, and of all the most profligate Ministers by whom those Monarchs were governed or deceived.

With respect to taxes, it must be admitted, that the French Government has publicly abjured all taxes whatever, together with loans, and every collateral branch of the system of finance. But what has been substituted in their place? It has been declared, that the only resources fit to sustain the dignity of a free and sovereign people, are domestic confiscation, and foreign plunder: a scheme of revenue calculated to perpetuate discord and misery at home, and war abroad. The legitimate and regular sources of public revenue are not unconnected with the ease and affluence of the people; they are sought in the superabundant profits of labour, of skill, and of enterprize, or in the superfluities of luxury and wealth. But the new resources are drawn from the exile and ruin of all the great landed proprietors, whose property is confiscated, because they will not expose their lives, by returning to a country, which has been rendered uninhabitable to all moderate and honest men. This is the reformed plan of finance which we are to expect, under the new Government in Great Britain. Its operation is plain and simple; taxes will no longer be levied according to those intricate and complicated regulations, which are now so embarrassing both to those who collect, and to those who pay. The land itself will be directly confiscated, and the landed interest will be utterly extirpated. The tree itself will be cut down, as the most easy and expeditious way of gathering its fruit.

Such are the practical effects of universal representation in France. To ascribe all these effects either to the peculiar character of that people, or to their unfitness to receive the blessings of liberty, from their long habits of slavery, would

be to deny to ourselves the use of a most instructive and salutary lesson. Making a reasonable allowance for all the peculiar circumstances of their case, it will be found, that the severest sufferings and the most atrocious crimes of that unfortunate people, are the genuine and legitimate offspring of the erroneous and fatal principles of Government, on which they have founded their reformed Constitution. The malignancy of those principles is so active and powerful, that no nation on earth could long withstand their operation: and it would be the greatest degree of arrogance to expect, that even the people of Great Britain could maintain their character of wisdom, justice, or humanity, under a total relaxation of those restraints of order, which the nature of human infirmity renders no less essential to the preservation of every moral quality, than of every civil advantage.

The result of all these considerations is, That the benefits actually enjoyed by the nation are invaluable; that no proof either has been, or can be, established of their being unconnected with the present Constitution of Parliament; and that there is the strongest presumption of an intimate connection subsisting between them; That in comparison with these benefits, the grievances alledged are trivial and insignificant; and that they can in no degree be imputed to the alledged defects in the representation; and above all, That the Constitution likely to be given to us in exchange for what we now possess, so far from securing any one practical good, or alleviating any alledged or practical evil, would utterly subvert every foundation of our present happiness and prosperity; would aggravate every evil of which any man now can complain; and introduce many others of infinitely greater magnitude, and of far more mischievous consequences.

For these reasons, the public good requires, that no alteration should be made in the existing frame of Parliament.

Mr. WHITBREAD said—Sir, the noble Lord who has just sat down, has pronounced a very warm panegyric on the British constitution; he has very ably argued the three questions which he has submitted to the consideration of the House; but he has not treated with great fairness some of the statements made by my honourable friend; and I feel myself under the necessity of disputing some of the conclusions to which he has

come, upon the grounds which himself has advanced. Whatever statement of consequences my honourable friend may have made, as involved in the discussion of the question before you, the same consequences were equally involved at every time when the proposition has been made. There is no novelty in the matter; and if a change of Government is now to ensue from a reform of the representation, a change of Government would equally have been the result of success at every one of the numerous periods when it has been agitated in this House. But the noble Lord has taken some pains to confound things which I hold to be perfectly distinct; namely, the *Government* and the *Constitution* of the country. To preserve, and not to subvert, is our aim; and with that view we wish to reform a part of the Administration of the Constitution. This only can be meant by my honourable friend, when he candidly states to you, that if he succeeds in persuading the House to adopt his motion, it leads to a change of the Government. But, Sir, I would put it to the noble Lord, and to all those gentlemen who have spoken on the same side of the question, and who come under the description given by an honourable Member last night, of those “to whom no time nor mode would reconcile the question of parliamentary reform,” whether it is not their bounden duty to enter the inquiry proposed by my honourable friend? I take it for granted they will not deny the existence of a very numerous body, discontented with the present state of the representation. Would it not be well to give satisfaction to those persons? If we go into a Committee, and find, on inquiry, that the complaints stated in the petitions are unfounded, there will be an end of the business. But if the grievances are found to be real, then a remedy ought instantly to be applied. It is a question which ought to be at rest; and it can only be so after a solemn and deliberate investigation of its merits. I would put it to my right honourable friend, (Mr. Windham) who, in the course of last night’s debate, considered the mover of this proposition as a mere point in a vast system which pervades all Europe; and the motion as only a dribble from a great source of anarchy and confusion, assuming parliamentary reform as a pretext, but the real object of which is to destroy all established constitution; and who has said, that these opinions, if fairly and early met, are capable of refutation; nay, that he would

consent to be called "the baby of a girl," if he did not destroy and crush, wherever he could have an opportunity of meeting them ; but that if suffered to grow up, they would become so formidable, as not to be conquered by any human ability.— Would it not, I say, be consistent with the manliness of conduct, with the talents of my right honourable friend, with the sense of the danger he professes of suffering these opinions to go uncontroverted, to put himself in a situation where he might have an opportunity of fully discussing them ; of confuting and suppressing that which he holds to be destructive to the well being of society ? Sir, upon his own arguments, he ought to vote with us for going into a Committee. But, Sir, is it a fact, that my honourable friend has proposed to you any novel or speculative opinions ? Directly the reverse. He has placed upon your table a petition, complaining of grievances, of the existence of which the petitioners deem themselves competent judges. It is proposed to this House to go into an investigation of their complaints, and to administer such relief as to their wisdom shall seem meet. The whole is constitutionally before you. But the petition is somewhat unusual, from the mode in which it is drawn. It goes into a detail of facts, some of which are directly in the teeth of certain resolutions entered on your journals. The resolution and petition cannot both remain. The petition states, that the undersigned are ready to prove *that Peers have a positive nomination of Members to serve in this House.* We annually resolve, "*That it is a high infringement upon the liberties and privileges of the Commons of Great Britain, for any Lord of Parliament to concern himself in the election of Members to serve in the Commons House of Parliament.*" What is the course then to be pursued ? You must either rescind your resolution, or expunge the petition from your journals. You cannot act with dignity and honour in any other way. The allegations in the petition are either true, or they are not. If true, a remedy ought to be sought for and applied. If they are not true, the persons who have signed that petition are guilty of a gross libel, and deserve punishment. Extricate yourselves from the dilemma !!

In contradiction to the assertion so repeatedly made by my right honourable friend, but which the power of his abilities will not be able to maintain, I take upon me to say, that me-

taphysical opinions have never, in any instance, produced a revolution. The engine with which Providence has thought fit to operate these mighty events, has been of a different description ; *the feelings of the governed, rendered desperate by the grinding oppression of their governors* ; and there is no saying more strictly true than this, that “ Times make men, but men never make the times.” What brought about that great event the reformation ? Not the theories or speculations of philosophers, but the impolitic avarice and injustice of the Church of Rome. What brought about the catastrophe of Charles the First ?—what the revolution in this country ?—The oppressions of the executive Government. To the same cause America owes her freedom. Lastly, what brought about the revolution in France ? The misery of the people ; the pride, injustice, avarice, and cruelty of the Court. The great characters who have acted in these different scenes, have had but little power to produce them. Luther, Cromwell, or Washington, the illustrious persons who appeared at the æra of the English revolution, or the wild visionaries of France, could never have persuaded the people to rise, unassisted by their own miseries and the usurpations of power. When the feelings of men are roused by injury, then they attempt innovation ; then the doctrines of enthusiasts find ready access to their minds. The people are always long suffering ; and unless they are most grossly abused, no apprehensions are to be entertained from any speculative opinion upon Government. But, Sir, in defending my honourable friend and myself from the imputation of being theoretical innovators, I must take notice of one theorist who has appeared in the course of this debate ; I mean the honourable gentleman (Mr. Jenkinson) who immediately followed my honourable friend last night. He gave us an account of a House of Commons formed after his own imagination, in which all the different interests of the kingdom would be indeed most accurately and nicely balanced ; but the texture was such as never did, nor ever would exist. One Member more than he has appropriated to either of the classes of army, navy, commercial, legal or landed interest, would destroy the whole of his chimerical system. One other notable expedient the honourable gentleman has fallen upon—that of settling who the *elected* should be, before he went in search of the *electors*. With all

deference, I should conceive that, having nominated the representatives, it would be a matter of small importance who should perform the farce of returning them. That honourable gentleman has also expressed his predilection for what is usually called the rotten part of the constitution, (the small boroughs) because they furnish us with Members of distinguished ability, (such as the present Chancellor of the Exchequer) who would not, from the expence, have had it in their power to contest any popular election. The observation is not new; but the answer to it is plain; if elections were conducted in the manner in which they ought to be, the representation would be accessible at all places to persons of moderate fortune; whereas it is now impossible, usually speaking, for the younger branches of families to stand contested elections; and the people are deprived of men of ability for their representatives. But I will take a definition of what a House of Commons ought to be, from a Tory writer, (Dean Swift), in opposition to the House of Commons described to us by the honourable gentleman. Speaking of the constitution of this country, that writer says, "The other part of the Parliament consists of an Assembly, called the House of Commons, who are all principal gentlemen, freely picked and culled out by the people themselves for their great abilities and love of their country, to represent the wisdom of the whole nation." This is the House of Commons I wish to see; this is the choice I wish to be restored to the people. The honourable gentleman has also said, that many boroughs have been *thrown open* since the passing of Mr. Grenville's act. Have the people been advantaged by the decisions under that act? I believe that nine-tenths of the Committees employed in discussing controverted rights of elections, have not settled any thing that can tend to the good of the people; that it is wholly out of their power. They may, indeed, have decided whether such a Lord, or such a great Commoner, have got the representation of a certain borough into their hands, or whether it is to be divided between them, and each to send a Member to this House. Or by the right of voting being enlarged, it may become a matter of doubt whether the interests of the proprietor may not be endangered by the opposition of some wealthy Nabob.—[A cry of "Order!"]—Sir, am I too free in what I am saying? Am I acting against your orders?

It may be so ; but if these things should meet your ear upon the very steps of this House, as you descend from the chair, can you contradict them ? Sir, you cannot. *I do know*, and the petitioners who have signed the petition now upon your table *are ready to prove*, that many Members are nominated by individuals to serve in this House. Refute the charge ! We cannot. Apply the remedy ! We will not consent to that. Then at least tell the people of England, We have investigated your statement, and we find it to be true ; but we can prove to you that the country is as well governed, and that things go on as well now, as they would do if the representation were reformed.

The noble Lord stated ~~as~~ an instance of the vigour of the constitution, as now administered, in the vast increase of our commerce within the period since the American war. Of the influence of the Crown upon this House, by means of the revenue raised upon that commerce, we complain, as destructive to the constitution. He has also asked, with a degree of triumph, at what time did the grievance of the national debt originate ? Sir, the time of its origin matters not : if, when the constitution was planted at the Revolution, was also planted *that*, which in time was to operate its destruction, we are not to consecrate the evil from a superstitious regard to the moment of its birth ; but we are to take precautions to prevent its strangling the fit and legitimate object of our veneration.

Some notice has been taken (by way of discrediting the petitions) of the names by which they are signed ; and the name of Mr. Hardy, who, by the way, has not subscribed the petition more immediately in question, has been particularly mentioned, with an allusion to his conduct during the last summer. This I take to be wholly unparliamentary and irregular. I do not stand up in defence of the propriety of Mr. Hardy's conduct ; but if he has in any manner offended against the laws of his country, His Majesty's servants are responsible for not having put the laws in execution against him. But whatever may have been his conduct out of this House, he appears before us in a manner prescribed and authorised by the constitution ; complaining of grievances ; and to his complaint we are as much bound to pay attention as to the complaint of any other of His Majesty's subjects whatever.

Insinuations have been thrown out against the Association of the *Friends of the People*, to which I have the honour to belong. All I shall say upon that subject is, that we formed ourselves into a society, on principles truly constitutional; that we in no one instance have deviated from the precise object of our institution; that we have been led astray by no change of circumstances; that we have formed no connections incompatible with our declarations; and that we have proceeded to the end we have in view with "intrepid moderation." This, Sir, is an expression contained in one of our publications which the noble Lord has attempted to ridicule; but are intrepidity and moderation, in fact, incongruous? The reverse is, I believe, the case; and that if ever we meet with true intrepidity of character, we shall find it connected with moderation. I trust and hope the people of this country will always be moderate in demanding their rights; at the same time, I should think our national character much degenerated, if they were not asserted with intrepidity.

The noble Lord has accused us of coalescing with persons, with whom we had formerly declared we would hold no intercourse, their views being incompatible with those we entertained; I mean the Members of the Constitutional Society. The short answer to that accusation is, that we have formed no such coalition. But I understand the society for the preservation of the liberty of the press to be pointed at—a society totally unconnected with the *Friends of the People*. Sir, at a time when associations were forming in every part of the kingdom, upon what I shall always deem the most unconstitutional principle, that of strengthening the hands of the executive Power; (for if the law has not made the hand of power strong enough, by the law it ought to be strengthened, and force can never be given to it in any other way, but by a surrender of some of the privileges of the people) the operation of these bodies appeared so pernicious, that it was thought expedient to associate to support the liberty of the press, which seemed to be principally in danger; and I have the pleasure to think that in stemming this tide we have not been wholly unsuccessful. To these meetings some of the persons alluded to certainly came; but had the noble Lord received a faithful report of our proceedings, he would have found, that no coalition had taken place.

between those persons and the Friends of the People; that, on the contrary, if any disposition has been manifested to deviate from the just limit of the Constitution, it has been constantly and successfully resisted by my honourable friends around me.

I cannot but consider it as a bad omen, that the appellation by which the society to which I belong is distinguished, "The Friends of the People," should, when mentioned in this House, be always received with a sneer. It appears, that gentlemen consider it as a term of reproach. Certainly, no reproach ought to attach upon the term; and I trust that as long as I have an existence as a Member of this House, and during the whole of my natural existence, I shall always be found a friend of the people, and a *defender* of their just and constitutional rights.

I shall beg leave to touch upon one other topic which has been strongly insisted upon, in the course of this debate, that the House of Commons ought to have an interest distinct from that of their constituents; and as a corrective to this monstrous doctrine, it is said, that whenever the people speak, their voice is heard and attended to. Sir, I maintain that there ought to be an identity of interest between the people and their representatives; nor can I conceive any thing more destructive to the true principles of the Constitution, than those sudden impulses which are at times given to the deliberations of this House by the expression of the popular will. We are thus not unfrequently betrayed into situations inconsistent with our dignity; we are thus driven to resolutions directly at variance with each other. I will instance to you the case of the two last years. In 1791, this House came to a vote, virtually declaring, that it was essential to the balance of Europe that Ozakow should remain in the hands of the Turks. In 1792, they voted the converse of that proposition. This could never have happened, were the House of Commons properly elected, and for short periods. Another bad effect arising from this momentary attention to the wish of the people, is, that when the people relax in their efforts, the House becomes supine. We have an example of this in the case of the slave trade. What produced the majority upon that subject in the last year? The voice of the people. Why has the question failed in this

session? Because the minds of the people have been diverted from the question, and they have not persisted in their demands. The House of Commons was intended to be elected by, and to act for, the people, and not to be influenced by every popular gust, which might sanction an imputation of its Members not being in the habitual discharge of their duty.

An honourable Baronet over against me, (Sir William Young) has said that this country has become so corrupt, through her commerce, that corruption is necessary to its Government. To this I will reply, in the words of a celebrated protest, usually ascribed to a right honourable Member of this House, (Mr. Burke), "If it is meant to insinuate that corruption is necessary to Government, I shall leave that principle to confute itself by its own apparent iniquity." If it be admitted that corruption is one of the springs of Government, if we are come to this most deplorable pass, that corruption is so interwoven with every part of the community of this country, that nothing proceeds but by its influence, we are much nearer to some awful crisis than I am willing to imagine. On this system, things may proceed for a time, but they will come to a sudden and tremendous termination.

And now, Sir, with permission of the House, I will say a few words upon the time in which this motion is brought before you. Any objection upon that score, unless forewarned, I should not have expected from the right honourable gentleman over against me (Mr. Pitt); for he has proposed the subject of parliamentary reform to this House under almost every variety of circumstance. But the time at which my honourable friend gave notice of his motion in the last year, did not appear to the Chancellor of the Exchequer to be fitting for the agitation of the question, although we were then at peace, and had a prospect of its continuance for fifteen years, because there existed a spirit of sedition and discontent in the country. How did the event answer to that assertion? The people, when called upon from one end of the nation to the other, expressed their loyalty, so as to disprove in the fullest manner every aspersions that had been thrown upon them by Government. The objection was not valid on that ground; but now we are actually at war, and therefore the time is improper. My opinion upon the subject of time is shortly this—that from the fluctu-

ation of human events, especially in this eventful æra, that it would be almost impossible to begin and perfect a work of such magnitude, under circumstances precisely similar : beginning in peace, we might end in war ; and as we now propose to you to consider it in time of war, I trust, even in case of its speedy termination, that it would be concluded in peace.

No time can be improper for doing what is right ; but *that of all others will appear to me to be the best, in which the object is the most likely to be obtained.* But let us consider the argument of time, with a reference to the consistency of our opponents. A right honourable gentleman (Mr. Dundas,) on whose account the anti-reformers have, I hope, held a jubilee, because there is more joy in Heaven over one that repents than over ninety just, has thought proper to accede in this session to a Committee to inquire into the government of the Royal burghs in Scotland, which had a view certainly to the representation of that country. In Ireland, which, it will not be improper to say, is very materially influenced by English Councils, the Parliament have thought proper to take the state of their representation into consideration. In Scotland and Ireland, then, there is no impropriety in the agitation of this question at this particular crisis. In England there is. Whence arises this difference ? Sir, I will tell you. The people of Scotland had been tampered with rather too long, and the Secretary of State, in his last visit to that country, may have seen the necessity of attending to their complaints. *The people of Ireland were determined to be listened to.* In England, the people are not sufficiently roused upon the subject to appear formidable to those in power. Whenever they are, whether it be peace or war, the time will and must appear proper. It is the part of wise men, however, to concede in treason. I have no objection to the example of France being pressed upon us, to prevent our running into the wild excesses which have disgraced that country.

But let us take the whole question into our consideration at once ; and when we behold with horror and dismay the atrocious acts which have been perpetrated under the name of liberty, let us not forget the preceding despotism which generated those crimes. Let us learn from the example of the old Government in France, to give way to the people in time : to

grant them their rights. Such are the only means to save ourselves from the horrors of anarchy. It has been the infatuation of all governments, from the beginning of the world, to turn a deaf ear to the complaints of the people ; to oppress them till they become desperate : when they are roused to a furious sense of their wrongs, then you are willing to make unlimited concessions ; but it is *then* too late ; the bonds of society are dissolved, and you must take the consequences of your own obstinacy and blindness. It is *yet*, I trust, time to give health and vigour to our Constitution ; but a much longer delay may be productive of consequences upon which I tremble to reflect. *Therefore* it is I would earnestly entreat this House to go into an investigation of the facts contained in the petition which has been presented by my honourable friend, and to apply a remedy to the grievances of which it complains.

I confess, however, that I can be but little anxious about the fate of the question immediately before you, because, from the experience which I have of the influence possessed by the Chancellor of the Exchequer on all the deliberations of this House, and from a knowledge of his opposition, any hope of success is entirely out of the question. [*A general cry of Order!*] Sir, said Mr. Whitbread, what I have said may here be disorderly ; but without your doors *it is true* ; and from my knowledge of that truth, I repeat that I entertain little anxiety on the fate of the present question : but I believe in the prediction of the late Earl of Chatham, who, in a prophetic spirit, has declared, that before the close of this century, an amendment would be made in the representation. Whether we will or not, the thing will be done ; and it would be policy, as well as justice, to anticipate the demands of the people. Neither my honourable friend, who has made you this motion, nor I, nor any of those gentlemen with whom I have the honour to act, have any intention to infringe on the prerogatives of the Crown, or to encroach on the aristocratical part of the Constitution ; we wish only to restore to the democracy that power which it ought to possess.

To conclude all I have to say on the subject, in the words of a celebrated protest, to which I before made some allusion, " That this motion is intended to diminish the constitutional power of the Crown, we deny. The constitutional power of

the Crown we are no less solicitous to preserve, than we are to diminish its unconstitutional influence."

"It has been argued, that this is not a proper time for reformation, when all the attention of the kingdom should be employed upon the war, as the great and only object in the present time of distress; to which we beg leave to insist, that the present is, for that very reason, the properest time, because nothing is so essential to the conduct and prosecution of the war, as the frugal management of that supply by which only it can be carried on with any prospect of success; and from the history of this, as well as other countries, times of necessity have been always times of reform."

Mr. ANSTRUTHER said, he did not know whether to condemn most, the manner in which the subject was brought forward, the time of its introduction, or the subject matter itself. With respect to the manner of its being brought forward, he thought it improper to introduce such a general motion as that of referring the petition to a Committee, instead of stating a specific plan upon which men might judge for themselves; the consequence of the present mode would be that of increasing the general expectation and agitation, by leaving it open to every man to suggest that plan which was the most agreeable to his own imagination. The time appeared to be equally ill chosen, when the country was engaged in a war, and after attempts had been made to agitate the minds of men by the propagation of principles incompatible with the existence of any Government. And, lastly, with respect to the subject of the petition itself, he thought it equally indefensible; the object of it, as far as he was able to comprehend it, was to obtain a right of universal representation, an idea so wild and extravagant, that he was astonished how gentlemen could seriously propose it. He admitted that no gentleman in that House had advanced such an opinion; but they talked of making one uniform state of representation throughout the kingdom, and of restoring it to its original constitutioned basis. He wished gentlemen would point out the period of the English history, when the representation of the people was according to their opinion in its purity. The state of representation had remained nearly the same ever since the revolution; and bad as it was represented to be, it was the envy of Europe;

and under it, notwithstanding the many expensive and bloody wars in which we had been engaged, this country had risen to a state of wealth and prosperity unknown to any country not enjoying the benefits of such a Constitution. In England the personal liberty and security of property were carefully provided for, and that was what the advocates for reform pretended to have in view ; but that House would take care how they sacrificed the solid blessings which we enjoy for the precarious possibility of greater advantages by a change.

Mr. Chancellor PITT said, “ I am anxious to deliver my opinion before, from the lateness of the hour, and the length to which the discussion has been carried, the attention of the House shall be exhausted. In the present state of the debate, it is almost impossible for me to speak on the subject without recurring to points which have already been mentioned. I feel more particularly anxious, on account of the share which I have had in agitating the question of a Parliamentary Reform, to state fully and distinctly the reasons which induce me to resist the motion which is now brought forward. The question at the present time involves the fate of all those who have hitherto been so long protected by the British Constitution ; nay, it involves the fundamental principles of every society and form of Government. But first I shall beg leave to remind the House of the grounds upon which I opposed the notice of a Parliamentary Reform, when brought forward last session. The opinion which I then entertained is confirmed by what has since occurred, and has even received strength from the petition now on the table, and the motion before the House. I then considered the agitation of the question as capable of producing much mischief, and likely to be attended with no good. Such was the conclusion which I formed from experience. I had myself, on different occasions, proposed a reform in situations which seemed favourable to my object, and supported by persons of the highest respectability, and had even then failed. Several gentlemen, from a dread of the consequences of innovation, and from a doubt whether the advantage to be obtained was such as would compensate for the risk incurred, opposed my views. If such arguments had formerly succeeded, how much force had they last year acquired from the dreadful lesson afforded in the example of a neigh-

bouring kingdom! The scene of horrors which it then presented exceeded imagination, far short, as it stood, of what has since occurred. I perceived forming within the bosom of the country a small, but not contemptible, party, who aspired at something more than a moderate reform, whose object indeed was nothing less than to introduce here those French principles which, from their consequences, I could not regard but with horror. I saw therefore, that while none of that good of which a moderate reform might be productive was to be obtained, much danger might be incurred, and an opening afforded to wicked persons to subvert that very Constitution which we were desirous to improve, only in order that we might preserve. Or though the attempt to reform might not be attended with the total subversion of the Constitution, yet it might lead to a state of confusion and distraction, which at least would disturb the enjoyment of those blessings of which we were in possession. I thus found the probability of good small, while the mischief was of a size so gigantic as to exceed calculation. And upon this reasoning, even if I had rated as high as ever the advantages of a reform, and had seen a greater probability than had hitherto appeared of accomplishing such a reform, I would rather have abandoned my object than have incurred or increased the danger. I would rather forego for ever the advantages of reform, than risk for a moment the existence of the British Constitution. Besides, I considered the necessity for a reform, in consequence of circumstances which had since occurred to be considerably less than when I had brought forward my original motion. But how then was the question argued on the other side? The danger which I stated was not denied. But it was alledged that this was precisely the time to bring forward a moderate reform, as the best means to quiet violent spirits, and the surest remedy against ruinous innovation. The gentlemen who now come forward in the cause of Parliamentary Reform, I have no doubt, were encouraged in their first exertions by the hope that they should be enabled to overawe the violent spirits, and that moderate men, who might otherwise have been misled, would be induced to join their standard. I have learned from their publications, that they not only proposed to guide the minds of the people, but also to be guided by them, and that they were resolved to

drop their views if they should find that they did not meet with a pretty general concurrence. Such was the situation of the business at the last session. I will now inquire what has passed since. And here I shall enter along with the noble Lord into the protest against not being allowed to introduce the subject of the affairs of France, which I consider as intimately, essentially, and inseparably connected with the present question.

Another year has now passed in that country, disgraced with excesses and outrages so horrid, that they efface the memory of those which formerly occurred, and leave of them only the faint traces, and the image hardly visible. The conduct of the French, in all its circumstances, bore a peculiar application to this country: it presented the fruits opening, in due season, the legitimate offspring of those trees, under the specious pretext of liberty, planted against this country and its allies. The French had disclosed a system of disseminating their principles, and procuring proselytes in every part of Europe, a system which they had particularly followed up with respect to this country. Such was the case without—what was the situation of affairs within? Societies had been formed in this country, affiliated with the Jacobine Clubs in France; and though they had since assumed a different shape, were then employed for the purpose of spreading Jacobine principles. In this object they proceeded with a degree of boldness and confidence, proportioned to the success of the French arms. We thus beheld the scheme which we had anticipated as the result of the new Constitutions in France opening upon us. We had more immediately an opportunity of seeing what were the views of the Legislators in France with respect to this country, and what their instruments in England were endeavouring to effect. For while in France, they always mentioned the pretext of a Parliamentary Reform, as the medium by which they were to introduce their principles; their instruments here always took care to connect the system of Parliamentary Reform with all those delusive doctrines, upon which was founded the newly-raised fabric of French freedom.—Nothing less than a National Convention was held out as a sufficient remedy for the abuses which prevailed in the representation, and the sole organ through which a more perfect

form of Government was to be obtained; namely, such a Government as should acknowledge no other source of authority and no other rule of conduct, than the will of the majority. In short, French principles were inculcated as the true standard of political belief, and the example of the French Government proposed as a worthy object of imitation. I now proceed to events of a more recent date. The spirit of disaffection which had been thus raised was happily kept under, and prevented from breaking out into action by the seasonable interference of the Legislature, by the vigilance and exertions of the Executive Power, by the loyalty, vigour, and unanimity of the people, and likewise by the interposition of Providence, in the turn lately given to affairs on the Continent, and the check experienced by the French arms. The admirers and supporters of French policy in this country felt a depression of spirits from the defeat of their friends and allies, which for a time gave a fatal blow to their hopes, and compelled them to conceal their views, and to assume a veil of caution but ill suited to the ardour of their temper, and the boldness of their enterprize. But though they had thus been forced for a while to relinquish their schemes, it was not to be presumed from this that they had by any means abandoned them—No; they still indulged the same hopes, they still meditated the same plans, and only lay by to watch for an opportunity favourable to the accomplishment of their designs. For that purpose, they had looked peculiarly to the question of Parliamentary Reform. Previous to the bringing forward the present motion, a great number of petitions had been presented to the House, equally singular in their form, expression, and the manner in which they had thus been submitted to notice. They had been introduced under the auspices of the gentlemen who supported the motion. They were all of three descriptions, except that one upon which the motion was more particularly founded, and a petition from Nottingham conceived in exactly the same terms with one which had been received from that place in 1782. When it had first been received, it came after a long war, which had harassed and exhausted the country, and the calamities of which it stated as a proper ground for a Reform of Parliament: unfortunately it still employed the same language, and gave the same description of the country,

after a long and prosperous peace. All these petitions came either from England or from Scotland, or from places in England and Scotland, that seemed to have no natural connection or likelihood of communication. Yet coming from these different places they were all the same in substance and nearly the same in stile; whatever little difference there might be in the expression, they seemed all to proceed from the same hands—

Non facies omnibus una

Nec diversa tamen : qualem decet esse fororum.

They all, it must be confessed, betrayed a strong family likeness. Almost the only difference was, that those from Scotland expressed their surprize at the immense load of debt, notwithstanding the extent of the taxes, which they stated at twenty millions, four millions above the truth. All of them were the same in prayer; they concurred in praying for the right of universal suffrage, as the basis of that reform which they desired. With respect to those petitions, two questions arose; first, What weight they ought to have with the House, and how far they ought to be allowed to go in influencing their judgement; and secondly, Whether this is a season proper for the consideration of that object which they claim, and favourable to a temperate reform? On the first point, when petitions came to the House, fabricated, in appearance, similar in substance and expression, it did not require much time to determine in what point of view they were to be considered. There was every reason to suspect that they were the work of a few individuals. They had certainly much more the appearance of the design of a few individuals, than of the general expression of the sentiments of the country. If it was asked, then, what weight they ought to have? the answer was easy. None. What weight ought to belong to petitions coming to that House in those circumstances, carrying every appearance of concert and system, combined in the same prayer, and expressed nearly in the same language? The fraud was too gross and palpable, and it was evident from what quarter they came, and with what views they were presented. All the circumstances in France and this country pointed out the present as a season unfavourable to a temperate reform. The gentlemen who supported the motion had been engaged in a society for a

twelvemonth for the purpose, as they themselves stated, of allaying the violence of those who might be misled by a blind rage of innovation, and enlightening the people with respect to the nature of their true claims. Such had been the objects which they had held out at their commencement; they had proposed to make a fair experiment, to allow the people of England a full opportunity of procuring a rational and moderate reform; and if they should find that they could not succeed, and that the people should be disinclined to any plan of reform, and not disposed to prosecute the measures which they should recommend, they were then to abandon their purpose. They had now gone on for upwards of a twelvemonth, publishing to enlighten the people, and using every means to promote their own influence, and during all that time they had not been able to make a convert of one man in England.— They had been obliged at last to come forward with a petition of their own, introduced to the House on the very day that the debate was to take place. The other petitions which united in the same object of demanding Parliamentary Reform carried a suspicious and dangerous appearance. Ought they not then, consistently with those principles which they had avowed in the outset, to have come forward upon this occasion, to have acknowledged their mistake and their conviction, that the people of England were not desirous of a reform, to have given up their object in which they found they could not succeed, and to have joined with us in opposing a reform which is not even desired, and which could not be granted with any propriety in the present moment, or even with the chance of advantage to those for whom it is demanded? But what are the grounds upon which they now bring forward this question of reform? First, they state, that from the general burst of loyalty expressed by the nation upon the first alarm, there is no reason to fear that the people will pass beyond the bounds of discretion, and that no season can be more favourable for a temperate reform than that in which they have so strongly testified their attachment to the established order of things, and their reluctance to any change. Of this temper they recommend to us to take the advantage. But how stands the case? The fact, I grant, is indeed true. But it is also true, that societies in this country have been anxiously seeking not to obtain

reform, but to find cause of dissatisfaction; not to allay the violence of innovation, but to inflame discontent. Is it then out of deference to that small party, actuated by such principles, and pursuing such a line of conduct, that we are to grant a reform, and not out of respect to the great body of the people of England, animated by a spirit of the purest loyalty, and too much attached to the blessings of the Constitution and the present Government, to wish to hazard them by a change? What then is the question at issue? It is the same question which is now at issue with the whole of Europe, who are contending for the cause of order, of justice, of humanity, of religion, in opposition to anarchy, to injustice, to cruelty, to infidelity. I am sensible that ninety-nine out of a hundred of the people of England are warm in those sentiments, are sensible of the security which they enjoy for these blessings from the frame of our excellent Constitution; and so far from wishing to touch it with an innovating hand, are prepared to defend it against every attack. Are we to yield then to the clamours of dissatisfaction and discontent; and are we to disregard the voice of satisfaction and gratitude? Are we in order to gratify the caprice, or sooth the insolence, of a few disaffected, to neglect the benefit of the common body? Are we at a moment of emergency like this, when the great cause of all is at stake, to suspend our cares for the public welfare, and attend to the discussion of petty claims and the redress of imaginary grievances? Are we, at such a moment, in order to please a few individuals, to hazard the consequence of producing alarm and distrust in the general body, firm and united in the common cause? This conduct would indeed resemble that of those who at the moment that their citadel was besieged should proceed to the discussion of points of difference rather than attend to providing the means of defence. The next ground alledged for bringing forward the motion for reform at present was, that this was a time of war, and that from the situation of commercial credit the country was in a state of alarm and distrust. These certainly were very strange reasons for such a measure; if we are engaged in a war for the purpose of defending ourselves against a foreign enemy, was this a reason why we should hazard the consequences of any distraction at home? This, instead of diminishing, would be the most effectual method to add to the

evil! Of the state of credit I shall say nothing, though the reasoning, as applied to it, stands in the same predicament; certain it is, that considerable embarrassment has lately taken place; a circumstance at all times very apt to result from an extensive commerce. The Legislature, much to their honour, have stepped forward, and made an exertion for the aid of the merchants, which, as it is extraordinary, I hope it will be successful; but can this embarrassment be ascribed to the Constitution, except by making the Constitution the cause of that extent to which commerce has been carried? But could this period and this state of affairs be brought forward as grounds for reform—by gentlemen who last year stated on the same occasion the duration of a long peace, and the high state of public prosperity, as their motives for calling the attention of the House to that subject? These were certainly two novelties which require to be reconciled before the gentlemen can make any pretensions to consistency of reasoning. I shall next proceed to remark on the precise nature of the motion itself. The motion is, to refer to a Committee one of those petitions for a reform which have been presented to the House. Whether the honourable gentleman who made the motion means likewise to refer them all, is a point of which I am not ascertained. [Mr. Grey here nodded assent.] If he means to refer them all, my reasoning on the subject is reduced to a very short compass. Ought we to refer to a Committee to deliberate on the measure of unlimited suffrage? The circumstance of having moved to refer the prayers of the petitions, without having pointed out any specific plan for obtaining their object, clearly renders it improper to go into any discussion on the subject. This circumstance has a tendency to excite discontent, without affording the means of allaying it. Though I formerly moved for a general inquiry, I was afterwards convinced, that it would be attended with no good effect, and abandoned the motion. I became sensible that there was no chance of obtaining any advantage, but by bringing forward a specific proposition. If I thought so then, how much more must I now be confirmed in the same opinion? If any object is proposed for discussion, it ought to be a specific object. The contrary mode can tend only to perplex the discussion, and to render it productive of mischief. I shall now shortly observe on the manner of intro-

ducing this business. The honourable gentleman stated fairly and candidly, that he brought forward the present question, not on the ground of right, but of expediency. I think so too. To talk of an abstracted right of equal representation, is absurd. It is to arrogate that right to one form of Government, whereas Providence has accommodated the different forms of Government to the different states of society in which they subsist. There are as many different rights as the causes which occur to diversify the modes of Government. There is one right for a Roman, another for an Athenian, and a third for a Lacedemonian; but though the honourable gentleman disclaimed the ground of general and abstracted right, he has so far enlarged his ground of expedience as to embrace the mode of reasoning, by which that wild theory is supported. He has declared himself ready to take even universal suffrage, that mode which he approves the least, rather than to suffer the Constitution to remain as it is. I so far differ with him, that I would rather abandon what I conceive to be the best plan of reform, than risk the consequences of any hazard to the Constitution, as it at present subsists. Can I then embark in the same Committee with the honourable gentleman, while he rejects the only plan on which I have contended for reform, and is ready to give into that which he himself deems the worst? I must confess myself alarmed at the extent to which he carries his object; and, I cannot help looking at the society with some degree of suspicion, in consequence of a letter which I find signed with his own name. This letter is addressed to the people of Sheffield. These people have so well benefited by those lessons of caution and moderation which they received from their patrons, the Friends of the People, that they lately addressed to the House a petition for Parliamentary Reform, conceived in such terms as rendered it improper to be received. They early communicated to the Friends of the People their plan for a Parliamentary reform, by assembling a Convention of National Delegates. The answer to this is nearly expressed in the following words: — “ On the plan which you have suggested we do not think it yet a fit time to deliberate. In a more advanced stage it may become a proper subject of discussion.” The honourable gentleman, in his ideas of reform, proceeds upon grounds directly opposite to mine, not indeed

less hostile to my views than they are to the present form of the Constitution. Upon the whole, from the method which he proposes, I see no probability of a temperate reform, and, if granted, it would not even answer the end for which it is demanded. So far from satisfying those who now solicit it, it would only extend their views and multiply and encourage their claims; they want not a Parliamentary Reform for itself, but for something else, in which they have prospect. They consider it not as the end of their wishes, but only means which may lead to their accomplishment. But here we are told, that by refusing this reform, we are acting upon the same principle by which we lost America, by not complying with the demands of that country. The Americans desired specific relief; they pointed out a definite object with which they pledged themselves to be satisfied. It was refused to them, because it was said, that it would only encourage them to ask for more. I do not now mean to enter on the propriety of this refusal, or a discussion of the means by which America was lost; but I cannot help remarking that there is a wide difference between the two cases. Here no specific relief is demanded, no definite object is pointed out. You are desired to give, what nobody asks; and to those who tell you, that even if you give it them, they will not be satisfied. It has been asked, who were the *they* so often alluded to in the course of the debate. The answer was short. They were those who have signed the petitions. They claim that which can be resolved into nothing but a deduction of French principles: that which is termed the will of the majority, the will of the multitude. The motion requires you to be prepared to deliberate whether it is right or not to give individual suffrage. On this question, I am not prepared to deliberate; first, because it wants no deliberation, and secondly, because I have deliberated upon it long enough already. I have not been so inattentive to what has now passed in a neighbouring kingdom, nor have I been so unaffected by the transactions which have there occurred, as not frequently to have taken this subject into consideration. I shall now give my reasons, why I am not prepared to deliberate on the question; and first, because my plan went to give vigour and stability to the ancient principles of the Constitution, and not to introduce into it any new principles. The merit of the British Constitution is to be

estimated, not by metaphysical ideas, not by vague theories, but by analysing it in practice. Its benefits are confirmed by the sure and infallible test of experience. It is on this ground, that the representation of the people, which must always be deemed a most valuable part of the Constitution, rests on its present footing. In the history of this country, from the earliest period down to that in which I now speak, the number of electors have always been few, in proportion to that of the great body of the people. My plan went to regulate the distribution of the right of electing Members, to add some, and to transfer others: when such was my plan, am I to be told, that I have been an advocate for Parliamentary Reform, as if I had espoused the same side of the question which is now taken up by these honourable gentlemen, and were now resisting that cause which I had formerly supported? I affirm, that my plan is ten times more contrary to that of the honourable gentleman, than his is to the Constitution: nay, I go farther; I agree with the honourable gentleman (Mr. Windham) that to adopt the system now proposed, is to adopt the principles of the French code, and follow the example of their legislators. As these principles are unknown in the history of this country, it is to France only that we can look for their origin. The same principle which claims individual suffrage, and affirms that every man has an equal right to a share in the representation, is that which serves as the basis of that declaration of rights on which the French Legislators have founded their government. We ought to recollect that there are 250 persons who possess an equal voice in the Legislature with that of this House; that there is a King, who, to the third of the Legislative, adds the whole of the Executive Power; and if this principle of individual suffrage be granted, and be carried to its utmost extent, it goes to subvert the Peerage, and to depose the King, and, in fine, to extinguish every hereditary distinction, and every privileged order, and to establish that system of equalising anarchy announced in the code of French Legislation, and attested in the blood of the massacres at Paris. The question then is, whether you will abide by your Constitution, or hazard a change, with all that dreadful train of consequences with which we have seen it attended in a neighbouring kingdom? Abide by your Constitution, did I say? It cannot be necessary

for me to add a word more. But I would not stop there if it were possible to go farther. If it were possible for an Englishman to forget his attachment to the Constitution and his loyalty to the Sovereign—if it were possible for him to lose all those generous feelings which bind him to his country and secure his obedience to its laws—if it were possible for him to sacrifice all these to those principles which are brought forward to support a change of government; yet, if he should attend only to reason, he would find them wild and illusive theories. He would find the principle of individual will powerful and efficient to the destruction of every individual and of every community; but to every good purpose null and void. He would find that those rights which entitle all to an equal share in the Government, are rights which only serve to remove them from useful labour, from sober industry, and from domestic connections, and which abandon them to be the slaves of every idle caprice, and of every destructive passion. The Government that adopts such principles, ceases to be a Government; it unties the bands which knit together society; it forfeits the reverence and obedience of its subjects; it gives up those, whom it ought to protect, to the daggers of the Marseillaise, and the assassins of Paris. Under a pretence of centering all authority in the will of the many, it establishes the worst sort of despotism. Such is the state of that wretched country, France, the detestable policy of which has added new words to the dictionary, such as the phrases of municipalities declaring themselves in a state of *permanent* revolution, and the nation itself in a state of *sovereign* insurrection! In what is called the Government of the multitude, they are not the many who govern the few, but the few who govern the many. It is a species of tyranny, which adds insult to the wretchedness of its subjects, by stifling its own arbitrary decrees the voice of the people, and sanctioning its acts of oppression and cruelty under the pretence of the national will. Such is the nature of those principles connected with the right of individual suffrage; and how far you are prepared to give countenance to that measure, by referring it to a Committee as a subject of deliberation, you are now called to determine.

Mr. SHERIDAN said, that if the right honourable gentleman who had just sat down thought it necessary to commence

his speech with an apology to the House for troubling them at that late hour, surely, then, it might be natural that he should make also an apology for intruding himself in the present stage of the debate. He was sure that the House, in any other circumstances than the present, might expect that apology; but on the present occasion he should not make an apology, for he would not pay the House so ill a compliment as to insinuate that the Members of it were not ready to do their duty in that House, which was to hear impartially all that could be said on either side of any question that came before them. The House had already heard, with patience and with attention, much observation on both sides; it was to their honour they had done so. He felt difficulties often when he had occasion to trouble the House, but upon this occasion he could not help thinking that he stood upon very advantageous ground. He knew the advantage which the right honourable gentleman had in that House, and that for many reasons he was more likely to be attended to than those who were to oppose him; few, if any, were heard within the walls of that House so attentively as that right honourable gentleman. But the task which devolved upon the person who had now the honour to address the House was great indeed: he knew that he and others of the same sentiments upon this subject had to speak freely bold unwelcome truths, and such as would not be heard with pleasure; yet so deeply was he impressed with a sense of his duty, that, notwithstanding all these disadvantages, he should not shrink from the task, but would do all in his power to perform it, even in the present situation of the House. He would not be discouraged, although he knew the effect of the burgher tenures, of which the petition complained. The petition stated, and he would repeat to that House, that many of the Members could only properly be addressed as the representatives of a particular person, and not the people of England. This he and those with whom he acted ought to say to a great number of the Members of that House: men who were either sent there by the express interference of the Crown, or by individuals, at the will of the Executive Government. They ought to say so, in order to be able to render an account to the Public, whose agent and attorneys they were, in order to satisfy that Public that they had not neglected their duty. They were

not in any case to be discouraged from the discharge of their duty ; for though they knew their numbers to be small, they yet were conscious their cause was good. The speech of the right honourable gentleman was an extraordinary effort of his great, splendid talents, noble and vigorous mind. He applied all his powers to this subject : he appealed with his utmost skill to the pride and the passions of the Assembly. The right honourable gentleman was aware that he was addressing his auditors upon a subject that required all his art, and therefore it was that all the art he was master of was used. It was a topic very worthy of the highest art ; that of convincing a great number of men that his conduct at this moment was not inconsistent, although perfectly different from his former professions. He thought, however, that the right honourable gentleman would have confined himself a little more to an explanation of the subject on which so much objection had been taken to his conduct ; instead of this explanation, he had found out a great number of auxiliary evasions. The right honourable gentleman now objected to his honourable friend's motion upon this subject : he objected to it now, because it was not specific, or because it did not contain a specific plan ; and yet it was a little whimsical that this sort of objection should arise from that right honourable gentleman, who himself had proposed precisely the same sort of motion. But the right honourable gentleman told the House that he was now convinced of the impropriety of that measure : convinced of the impropriety ? What was it that convinced him ? Was he afraid that the proposal of asking for a Committee to inquire into the truth of any allegation of the corruption of Parliament might be attended with success ? What was he afraid of ? Did he fear he should be obliged to carry a plan for a Parliamentary Reform ? He hoped the right honourable gentleman had some reasons for this change of his mind, which were honourable to himself, although he had not divulged them. But the change of the right honourable gentleman's mind upon this part of the subject was still more inapplicable, for he said even now that he had not totally abandoned all thoughts of persisting in some measure for a Parliamentary Reform ; and yet he seemed to say that he should never agree to any plan upon that subject that had not some specific reme-

dy to a stated grievance. This was the more to be wondered at, when it was remembered that when that right honourable gentleman made one of his motions for a Parliamentary Reform with a specific remedy, he was negatived by a large majority. But when he moved it merely as a plan for a Committee of Inquiry, such as the present motion was, he was resisted only by a majority of twenty in a full House. Whatever the right honourable gentleman might think or might wish, Mr. Sheridan said, he, for his part, had no doubt but that a motion for a Committee of Inquiry was the most eligible plan that could be proposed upon this subject. This, he said, for many reasons, one in particular, he could not help stating, which was the facility with which objections could be stated. Many persons, who were in their hearts enemies to the whole system of any Parliamentary Reform, might yet, for the sake of concealing it, say, If you had brought some other plan forward, I should have given it my support; but I am convinced that this plan is an improper one; and therefore there were always more enemies to a specific than a general plan. This petition, therefore, in his opinion, was a proper one. It stated certain grievances, which the Petitioners were ready to prove at the bar of that House; and he knew not upon what principle of justice it was that the House could refuse entering into an inquiry. But there was said to be a great objection remaining to this petition, from the nature of its allegation, as well as the prayer of it; for that it went to ask that which was against the principles of our Constitution. Gentlemen had laid great stress upon what they stated in that respect, which was, that the principles of our Constitution, and the whole of the system of our representation, was select, and that a system of general representation would destroy the whole of the spirit of the Constitution altogether, by which representation was not matter of right. Gentlemen, in making this observation, were confounding the means with the principle — the principle of our Constitution was representation; the means were selection and distribution. To illustrate this, Mr. Sheridan read the preamble of an act of Parliament, passed in the reign of King James the First, in which was stated, that the whole of the Commons were present when the bill passed their House. This was always the principle of

the Constitution of this country. Another thing was stated as an objection to the petition, which was, that it went to the extent of asking for an universal representation. Nothing was easier than to say so ; but that was not the fact : the Petitioners did not claim the right of universal suffrage. But gentlemen urged, as another objection to the granting of the prayer of this petition, the danger which would attend it ; and some went so far as to say, that if there were a full and complete representation of the people in that House, there would be an end of the other two branches of the Legislature ; for that the power of the Commons would be so great, that the King and Lords would be voted useless. Such observations he thought highly dangerous, and he must say he did not think that sentiments more mischievous than these ever were uttered within the walls of that House ; and he was sure that if the representation of the people were complete to-morrow, the people of this country had too much good sense to instruct their representatives to do any thing to affect the just prerogative of the King, or to diminish the privileges of the nobility : they would not suffer their agents to do any thing of that nature, because they knew that if they did, their own power would be in danger. He would repeat it, that the good sense of the people of this country would have their own interest in view, and that if the representation of the people in the House of Commons was complete, the King would be firmer upon his throne than he was even at this moment. Another objection made by the right honourable gentleman was that which arose from the danger of transacting business in this case through the medium of delegates. How the right honourable gentleman had, on a sudden, formed such a dislike to delegates he did not know ; but it reminded him of what had happened on a former occasion, when this subject was under the direction of the right honourable gentleman himself ; they had then delegates, and he (Mr. Sheridan) happened to know this, because he was one of the Committee himself : so far was it from being thought at that time an impropriety, that the right honourable gentleman determined on carrying on the business in that very manner ; and the Lord Mayor of London gave them the use of Guildhall to transact their business, and gave them and the delegates all the encouragement he could to proceed upon

the plan which they had commenced ; but now the word delegate seemed to be disagreeable to the right honourable gentleman. Indeed, Mr. Sheridan observed, that there seemed to him to be a great deal of insincerity in the conduct of the Chancellor of the Exchequer upon this subject. He should have told those who had now brought this matter forward, that they were not to expect his assistance : this would have been infinitely more manly than his present behaviour. He wished the Chancellor of the Exchequer would either tell the friends of Parliamentary Reform when he thought he should lend them his assistance, or say that he never will. He had proved he was of opinion that a season of permanent prosperity was not the time. He had proved too that a time of war was not the time. Should they have the assistance of the right honourable gentleman after the war with France was over, or should we then be told, that the French being subdued, we should not suffer any alteration in our own Constitution ? He should either say at what time he should lend that assistance, or say that he was in the wrong when he brought the subject of Parliamentary Reform forward, and since that time he had seen his error, and had therefore abandoned his principle. Mr. Sheridan said he had rather hear that the right honourable gentleman had abandoned it altogether, than find that he abandoned it only while he was Minister, and that he should take it up again when he shall be out of power, because that would cast a shade upon the whole subject, and make the people of this country think there was nothing like honesty among those who professed attachment to the rights of the people, and the people might therefore despise all parties, and come to a determination of doing every thing for themselves. Mr. Sheridan then observed, that the right honourable gentleman had intimated that the people were not desirous of a Parliamentary Reform, and that only a few individuals had expressed that wish. Upon this occasion he referred to the speech of an honourable gentleman (Mr. Duncombe) early in this debate, and there it would be found that the honourable gentleman had said that he believed in God that the prediction of the late Earl of Chatham would prove true, that a reform in Parliament would be had before the end of the present century. It had been said that the measure proposed would be dangerous at

the present moment, on account of the connection between France and this country. There could not be a more unfair argument than this, because nothing could be more different than the dispositions of the people of France and the people of this country. The one knew, and had enjoyed for a long time, a certain portion of liberty ; the other had but just ousted their despotism ; and therefore to refuse to inquire into this subject on that account was ridiculous. The right honourable gentleman had said much on the vigour of our Constitution : he never should attempt, he said, to deny but that the vigour of our Constitution produced wealth ; on the contrary, he allowed that wealth rose out of the Constitution ; but if we persisted in not taking care to preserve that Constitution by every means in our power, the very wealth it produced would be the means of its destruction ; and the wealth which the Constitution had been the means of acquiring was the best reason why a reform should take place. Mr. Sheridan then took notice of the observation of a right honourable gentleman (Mr. Windham), who had spoken in a former debate on this subject ; that right honourable gentleman, in the course of his speech, had said, that he was opposing those who had a wish for a revolution in this country, and not a reform. He took some time to prove that they could not lay any stress upon the representation of this country as a principle. He saw that one petition contained more names than all the electors of this country who returned one half of the Members of that House. This was certainly very alarming to those who agreed with the logic of that right honourable gentleman, because he maintained that the more numerous the Petitioners were, the greater was the chance of their being in the wrong ; and yet again, after thus speaking against majorities, he proceeded to run down the minority. That right honourable gentleman had often been in a minority ; but having lately had dealings chiefly with the majority, and therefore had an excellent opportunity of shewing his judgement by dividing with the minority, he had a better opportunity of knowing their error. Having played upon this point for some time, he turned again to a serious view of the subject, and observed, that there were but three ways of judging of any point : the first was, by reason and truth ; the second was, by majority of the opinion of those

who think on the-subject ; the third was, force. If the first were sufficient, the other two would be unnecessary, and there would be no occasion for Government, because if man was to be governed by reason and truth, he would be perfect, and, being perfect, it would not be necessary that he should be governed ; but as man was a frail being, it was necessary that he should have some government, and therefore there remained but the other two for his choice. Now of these two he believed there was no difficulty in chusing ; for as we all abhorred force, we came to the necessity of adopting the opinion of the majority of our fellow beings, and therefore the right honourable gentleman, in declaring himself in a state of permanent insurrection against the majority of the people, was not perfectly correct. As to the general challenge of proving the abuse which subsists in our Government, Mr. Sheridan said, he had no delight in it ; but as he must answer—Some then of the abuses of which he complained, and of which a reform of Parliament was the only remedy, were, that Peers of the other House sent Members to the House of Commons by nomination ; that the Crown sent Members into that House by nomination too ; that some Members of that House sent in Members by their own nomination also—all these things made a farce of an election for the places for which these gentlemen were returned ; that men were created Peers without having been of the least service to the Public in any action of their lives, but merely on account of their parliamentary influence—the present Minister had been the means of creating a hundred of them. He did not blame him, but the fault was in the system of Government ; that corruption was the pivot on which the whole of our public Government affairs turned ; that the collection of taxes was under the management of wealthy men in parliamentary interest, the consequence of which was, that the collection of them was neglected ; that, to make up the deficiency, excisemen must be added to the excise—this soured the temper of the people ; that neither in the church, the army, the navy, or any public office, was any appointment given, but in consequence of parliamentary influence ; that, in consequence, corrupt majorities were at the will of the Minister. He did not like to tell secrets of the prison house of the Treasury, but in the present instance he was called upon.

In short, whether the eye was directed to the Church, the Law, the Army, or to Parliament, it could only observe the seeds of inevitable decay and ruin in the British Constitution. He next animadverted upon the American war, its origin, and issue: there he maintained that delusion was practised under the pretence of taxation, but in the end this country had paid dearly for the experiment of Ministers. He alluded to the proselytism which had been ascribed to the views of the French nation, and of which they now seemed themselves to be thoroughly ashamed, since similar doctrines had been carried into execution, by the Empress of Russia and the King of Prussia, with regard to the unhappy partitioned kingdom of Poland. Mr. Sheridan concluded by stating, that the object of reform he and his colleagues had in view would be persevered in until it was effectually accomplished.

Mr. ADAM said, he felt it his duty to assign the reasons for the vote he meant to give, and this he should do in very few words. Much as he respected his honourable friend who presented the petition, and those who supported the motion for referring it to a Committee, he saw no possible advantage that could arise from taking it into consideration. The style of it was not new: all the objections which it contained to the present form of the representation were stated in nearly the same manner by Dr. Paley, but with an inference very different from that of the petition. "The objections," said Dr. Paley, "were of a nature to strike only at first sight, and to disappear on more accurate examination." It was, therefore, highly necessary to consider, when any alteration was proposed, whether the benefit to be gained was equal to the risk to be incurred. This doctrine had his entire assent; and to refer the petition to a Committee would shew only what they knew before, that there were inequalities in the representation. The next point to be inquired into was, whether or not the representation, in its present form, was such as to secure to the people those rights which were the end of all government. It had been said, that the best of all possible governments would be absolute monarchy, under a wise and virtuous prince: this he denied; for although a wise and virtuous prince might maintain those rights to the people, they had no security for their being continued. Civil rights could not be secure without

political rights, and the question now was, Had we such political liberty as to secure the possession of our civil rights? That we once had was admitted. A learned friend of his (Mr. Erskine), who argued in support of the motion, admitted that the representation was sufficient for this purpose before the Revolution. Since the Revolution he affirmed that the constant operation of all changes had been to extend the personal and contract the virtual representation. The various acts passed to secure the independence of elections were proofs of this; and the increase of wealth and population had added much to the number of electors in the great towns. There was also another reason: the debates in that House were more generally known, and more particularly attended to. Every Member knew when he was speaking that his arguments and conduct would be discussed and canvassed by the public at large. He therefore was clearly of opinion that the representation, in its present form, was fully adequate to all the purposes which it was intended to answer. For these reasons he should vote against the motion. With respect to the time of making it, there was no solid objection; for the alarm on which it was attempted to found an objection, he had always believed there was no ground; and, conceiving the merits of the argument to be as he had stated them, he conceived those who resorted to a variety of other topics to have rather weakened than strengthened it.

Mr. FOX said, he was sorry to trespass on the patience of the House at so late an hour, when, after two days' debate, he could have but little hope that he should either entertain or instruct. It was new and extraordinary, that, by the course and mode of argument pursued by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, he should feel himself called upon to apologise for persisting in the opinion which he had always held upon Parliamentary Reform, or to assign his reasons and justify himself for not altering it as the right honourable gentleman had thought fit to alter his. He had never before imagined that the presumption of guilt lay against consistency, and that whoever presumed to think as he had always thought before must immediately be put on his defence. If the opinions which the right honourable gentleman formerly professed, if the propositions which he had endeavoured to persuade Parliament to

adopt, were so very erroneous, and pregnant with such alarming consequences as he had now depicted, it was but natural to suppose that he would have read his recantation with compunction, and expressed humiliation instead of triumph in recapitulating the enormous mischiefs to which his former errors might have exposed his country. He assumed that the right honourable gentleman had completely changed his sentiments on Parliamentary Reform, for he had expressly said so, with the poor reserve, that the time might yet come when he should think it as expedient as he had done before. The arguments he had used would apply equally to all times; and it would have been more candid to have said so explicitly, than to have held out a hope, whom to please he knew not, which, without a second change of opinion as entire as the first, could never be realised. In his arguments against the present motion he had had recourse to the mistake that the object of the present motion was universal suffrage; against this, which made no part of the motion, more than half his speech was employed, and every idea of that part borrowed from what had been urged against himself ten years ago by those who opposed his first motion of reform. Here he was only a plagiarist; not a common plagiarist indeed, but such a plagiarist as Virgil, who improved and adorned what he borrowed. He was obliged to admit that his honourable friend who made the motion disclaimed universal suffrage for his object; but then, he said, look at the petitions, only one of which, however, contained this doctrine. Was he ready to say, that, when he brought forward his motion in 1782, none of the petitions then before the House contained the very same? But, in addition to the evidence of the petitions, his honourable friend had, on some other occasion, met certain persons at a tavern, known advocates for universal suffrage, which was almost proof positive that his honourable friend was so too. How did this sort of inference operate against the right honourable gentleman himself. When he brought forward his plans of reform, he was acting at all points with the Duke of Richmond, the great apostle of universal suffrage; and it was no very unreasonable supposition that his very first motion on the subject of reform might have been concerted with his

Grace at Richmond House. If then men's intentions were to be canvassed by supposed privy to the designs of others, the privy of the right honourable gentleman to the Duke of Richmond's system of universal suffrage could not be denied, and he must be pronounced guilty by his own rule.

The right honourable gentleman's next objection was to the mode; the very same mode which he himself had adopted. On more mature consideration he had altered his mode; but here he must intercede for the right honourable gentleman's juvenile judgement, and in particular request that he would not insist on dragging through the dirt all those who had supported him in his first motion. What reason he had for changing a motion, which he lost only by twenty votes, was perhaps better known to himself than to others; but he had no right to say that a motion of the same kind was more dangerous now than his own in 1782. He who had supported all his motions for reform, thought the first the least objectionable of them all. The mode of proceeding lately insisted upon, that a Member who proposed the redress of any grievance must move a specific remedy before the House could take the grievance into consideration, was directly contrary to the most approved parliamentary practice. The Member who moved for a Committee might go into it with a specific statement, which he might see reason to alter, unless indeed the right honourable gentleman had got an exclusive patent for altering opinions; or the Committee, supposing the grievance to be proved, might suggest a plan of their own, subject, like every other, to future modification or rejection by the House, when it appeared in the form of a bill. Such was the most convenient and the most ordinary mode of proceeding in all matters of great importance. Now what was the right honourable gentleman's specific plan? He owed an apology to all those who voted for it, and to him (Mr. Fox) among the rest, and who, although they approved of a parliamentary reform, did not approve of his particular plan, but trusted, that, when the general question was carried, they should be able to frame the plan in a less exceptionable manner. These were the precise conditions on which he then called for the support of all who wished well to parliamentary reform; and now he pretended to say that, by

supporting it, they pledged themselves not to the general question, but to the particular plan. The general rule was, for all who agreed on the existence of a grievance, and the necessity of a remedy, to concur as far as they could, and then to debate the particulars at a more advanced stage. This was a sufficient answer *ad hominem* to the right honourable gentleman, and to all the arguments against the mode. All those who wished well to the general subject ought to concur in support of the present motion, and if that were carried, the specific plan would come properly under discussion in a future stage.

Another objection was to the time. When the right honourable gentleman made his motion, he alledged, as the reason for it, that there were no adequate means for supporting a good Minister, or of repressing a bad one, without a reform in the representation; that to the inadequacy of the system had the misfortune of the American war been owing; and that it was necessary to provide against the nation's falling into a similar calamity. What had since happened to make the calamity less to be dreaded, or the precaution less expedient? Under the administration of the Marquis of Rockingham, an administration of which he approved, the right honourable gentleman first proposed reform, and that too in a time of war. Under another administration, of which he did not approve, he again proposed it, and in time of peace. On neither of these occasions did he consider the character of the Ministry as at all affecting the expediency of his motion, nor had he ever argued on it in that way. A third administration succeeded, of which he certainly did not entertain a bad opinion, for he was at the head of it himself; still he maintained, or said he maintained, all the doctrines he had held before on the necessity of reform. His reason could not be that he distrusted the virtue of the then House of Commons, for it was a favourite House of Commons, on all occasions much extolled by him. Such a favourite indeed, that his plan of reform was not to commence till after the dissolution of that Parliament. Thus, under all possible circumstances of time, in time of war, in time of peace, under an administration which had his confidence, under an administration that had it not, and when he himself was Minister, had the right honourable gentleman

agitated the question of reform. What was there now to make it improper for another to do that which it had been proper for him to do in every variety of time and circumstances? The prosperity of the country was no argument against reform, for it was not urged as a necessary measure to restore prosperity, but to give security to the prosperity which we enjoyed. That security, by the right honourable gentleman's own admission, no change of Ministers, nothing else could give; for he had moved it when Minister himself, and he did not surely distrust his own administration. When his honourable friend gave notice of his motion last year—a part of his argument which had been very unfairly treated—he said, that a time of national prosperity and peace, as the Minister had described that to be, must be considered as favourable for reviving the question of reform. Since then this unfortunate and mad war had been entered into, and his honourable friend said, “You who objected to my motion last year, as improper in the season of prosperity and peace, cannot now make the same objection in the season of war, and much public distress.” This, which he adduced merely as an *argumentum ad homines*, to prove the inconsistency of his opponents, was attempted to be made a charge of inconsistency against himself. What objection could the right honourable gentleman raise to reviving the question of reform in a House of Commons which he had found so favourable to him on every other subject? He would hardly venture to say that the House of Commons had been so universally complaisant to him, that he was sure they would never support a bad Minister. Had they often joined him in opposing Ministers whom he thought bad, he might indeed say that they would never suffer misconduct in a Minister; but on nine years experience of support to his own administration, it would be rather too much to make the same inference. There could be no objection to the motion being made now, except that it was made by his honourable friend instead of the right honourable gentleman. In the pride of his new wisdom, his present self felt such contempt for his former self, that he could not look back on his former conduct and opinions without a sort of insulting derision. As Lord Foppington in the play said, “I begin to think that when I was a commoner, I was a very nauseous

fellow ;" so the right honourable gentleman began to think, that when he was a reformer, he must have been a very foolish fellow : he might, nevertheless, have retained some degree of candour for his honourable friend, who had not yet received the new lights with which he was so marvellously illuminated. If the right honourable gentleman had rested his objections on the change of circumstances produced by the events in France, his argument would have been rational, or at least consistent. But he appealed to the recollection of the right honourable gentleman, whether he had not in 1785 argued as earnestly against universal representation, and painted the dangers of it in colours as strong as he had done now ? The events in France, therefore, had produced no aggravation of the danger in his view of the subject, but rather made it less, in as much as the example of its effects in France had brought it into utter discredit in the mind of every thinking man ; and what he had not considered as an objection to his own motion in 1785, he had no right to insist upon as an objection to the motion of his honourable friend now.

He had always disliked universal representation as much as the right honourable gentleman ; but that dislike was no reason for charging it with more mischief than was fairly imputable to it. It had not been the cause, as the right honourable gentleman alledged, of all the evils in France. The first, or Constituting Assembly, was not elected on this plan, but on old usages and old abuses ; yet that Assembly had done some of the most unjustifiable things done in France : it had despoiled the clergy without regard to situation or character, and destroyed the nobility. The second, or Legislative Assembly, was not chosen by individual suffrage ; for when the constitution was framed, wild as the French were, they had laid many restrictions on individual suffrage, and made the distinction between active and inactive citizens. It was, therefore, unjust to charge on it what was done by assemblies elected before it was brought into use. France, after doing great honour to herself by shaking off her old intolerable despotism, had since been governed by counsels generally unwise, and often wicked. But what had this to do with our reform ? It had been said, that French principles, though not more detestable than the principles of Russia, were more dangerous and more to be

guarded against, because more fascinating. Would any man now say that French principles were fascinating? What then had we to fear from what no man in his senses would wish to copy?

A right honourable friend of his (Mr. Windham) had last night, in a very eloquent, but very whimsical speech, endeavoured to prove that the majority was generally wrong. But when he came to answer some objections of his own suggesting, he found himself reduced to say, that, when he differed from the majority, he would consider himself as equally independent of the decision of that majority as one independent country of the decision of another, which was just to say that he would put an end to society; for where every individual was independent of the will of the rest, no society could exist. It was singular for him to defend the decision of the majority, who had found it so often against him; and he was in hopes that his right honourable friend would have shewn him some easy way of solving the difficulty. His right honourable friend said a wise man would look first to the reason of the thing to be decided, then to force, or his power of carrying that decision into effect, but never to the majority. He would say, look first, and look last to the reason of the thing, without considering whether the majority is likely to be for or against you, and least of all to force. He admitted that the majority might sometimes oppress the minority, and that the minority might be justified in resisting such oppression, even by force; but as a general rule, though not without exception, the majority in every community must decide for the whole, because in human affairs there was no umpire but human reason. The presumption was also that the majority would be right; for if five men were to decide by a majority, it was probable that the three would be right and the two wrong, of which, if they were to decide by force, there would be no probability at all. What was the criterion of truth but the general sense of mankind? Even in mathematics we proceeded from certain axioms, of the truth of which we had no other proof but that all mankind agreed in believing them. If, then, what all men agreed on was admitted to be true, there was a strong presumption that what many, or the majority, agreed on, was true likewise. Even reverence for antiquity resolved itself

into this ; for what was it but consulting the decision of the majority, not of one or two generations, but of many, by the concurrence of which we justly thought that we arrived at greater certainty ? His objection to universal suffrage was not distrust of the decision of the majority, but because there was no practical mode of collecting such suffrage, and that by attempting it, what from the operation of hope on some, fear on others, and all the sinister means of influence that would so certainly be exerted, fewer individual opinions would be collected than by an appeal to a limited number. Therefore, holding fast to the right of the majority to decide, and to the natural rights of man, as taught by the French, but much abused by their practice, he would resist universal suffrage. Without attempting to follow his right honourable friend, when he proposed to soar into the skies, or dive into the deep, to encounter his metaphysical adversaries, because in such heights and depths the operations of the actors were too remote from view to be observed with much benefit, he would rest on practice, to which he was more attached, as being better understood. And if by a peculiar interposition of Divine power, could be collected all the wisest men of every age and of every country into one assembly, he did not believe that their united wisdom would be capable of forming even a tolerable constitution. In this opinion he thought he was supported by the unvarying evidence of history and observation—another opinion he held, no matter whether erroneous or not, for he stated it only as an illustration, viz. that the most skilful architect could not build, in the first instance, so commodious a habitation as one that had been originally intended for some other use, and had been gradually improved by successive alterations suggested by various inhabitants for its present purpose. If then so simple a structure as a commodious habitation was so difficult in theory, how much more difficult the structure of a government ? One apparent exception might be mentioned, the Constitution of the United States of America, which he believed to be so excellently constructed, and so admirably adapted to their circumstances and situation, that it left us no room to boast that our own was the sole admiration of the world. The objection, however, was only apparent. They had not a constitution to build up from the foundation ;

they had ours to work upon, and adapt to their own wants and purposes. This was what the motion now recommended to the House, not to pull down, but to work upon our Constitution, to examine it with care and reverence, to repair it where decayed, to amend it where defective, to prop it where it wanted support, to adapt it to the purposes of the present time, as our ancestors had done from generation to generation, and always transmitted it not only unimpaired, but improved, to their posterity.

His right honourable friend (Mr. Windham) had said, on a former occasion, (Mr. Flood's motion), that if the constitution of the House of Commons were that the county of Middlesex alone elected the representatives for the whole kingdom, he would not consent to alter that mode of representation, while he knew from experience that it had produced such benefits as we had long enjoyed. Now, suppose, for the sake of argument, that the county of Cornwall, somewhat less likely to be a virtual representative of the whole kingdom than Middlesex, were, instead of sending forty-four Members to Parliament, to send the whole five hundred and fifty-eight, such a House of Commons might, for a time, be a proper check on the executive power, and watch over the interests of the whole kingdom with as much care as those of Cornwall; but with such a House of Commons no argument would persuade him to remain satisfied, because there was no security that it would continue to do so. The question now to be examined was, Did the House of Commons, as at present constituted, answer the purposes which it was intended to answer; and had the people any security that it would continue to do so? To both branches of the question he answered decidedly in the negative. Before proceeding to the reasons on which he thus answered, it was necessary to say a few words on the circumstances which, in his opinion, would justify a change. Many things short of actual suffering would justify not only a change, but even resistance. When the dispute began with America, it was not because it was held that the British Parliament had no legal right to tax America that the project of taxing her was opposed. The Americans indeed did maintain that the British Parliament had no such right; but he and many others who opposed the measure admitted the right, and he was still of the

same opinion. What then was the ground of the opposition? It was not any actual suffering on the part of the Americans: they themselves allowed that the taxes attempted to be imposed were of the most easy and unoppressive kind. But although these taxes were so, they had no security that heavy and oppressive taxes might not, at some future period, be imposed upon them by a legislative body, in which they had no representation, with which they had no very close connection of common interest, and over which they had no means of control. He, therefore, and those with whom he had the honour to act, thought this want of security, for what they were not then ashamed to call the rights of man, a sufficient cause of resistance. They justified the Americans in that glorious resistance, for which they were then called the advocates of American rebels, as some of them, though too familiar with such charges much to heed them, were now called the advocates of the French. That glorious resistance was ultimately successful, and to that success would yet be owing the liberties of mankind, if in this country they should unhappily be suffered to perish. Jealousy too was a good cause of change, or even of resistance—not jealousy captious or malignant, but jealousy founded on well-examined and rational grounds of suspicion. Men were not bound to wait till their liberties were actually invaded; prudence called for means of prevention and defence; and, to justify these, it was sufficient that they saw a clear possibility of danger.

Now, to shew that the House in its present state was unfit for the functions which it ought to discharge, he referred to the history of the American war. It was dangerous to make a concession in argument, for on that concession was generally built some assertion very different from what had been conceded. He had once admitted that the American war was popular in the beginning; and on that had been built the assertion, that he had called it the war of the people. He never called, nor meant to call it so; for, in truth, it was nothing less—it was the war of the Court. By the Court the project of taxing America was conceived, and the People were taught to believe that their money would be saved, and their burdens eased by a revenue drawn from another country.

Thus were they first deluded, and then bribed by an appeal to their pockets, into an approbation of the scheme of the Court. This was no assumption of his, for it was perfectly well known, that when a considerable addition to the standing army was proposed, the country gentlemen were induced to agree to it, by hints that the expence would be defrayed from another quarter, instead of falling upon them. In compliance with the wishes of the Court, the House passed the memorable Stamp act. The Stamp act was resisted and repealed; and the repeal was as popular as the passing of it had been. Was this a presumption, that the war was the war of the people? Was it not, on the contrary, a clear proof that the people had no definite idea of the object of the war? When, by subsequent acts of the same nature, and similar resistance on the part of America, the war was brought on, then indeed the indignation of the people was excited by the supposed ingratitude of the colonies to the mother country; their passions inflamed; the love of military glory, natural to the minds of a great and brave nation, roused; and the war became popular. But the war itself was the act of the Court, deluding the People by the subserviency of the House of Commons. The House passed the Stamp act; the House took all the other measures that led to the war, and voted that it should be supported, not as the organ of the People, but as the obedient servant of the Court. What was a successful war? he was somewhat at a loss to know. The American war, from the beginning, he had always called unsuccessful; but he was year after year told that he was quite mistaken, and that the success was fully adequate to every reasonable expectation. At length came the final blow, the capture of Lord Cornwallis and his army — the war was acknowledged to be unsuccessful, and the House put an end to it, but not till several years after the People had begun to send up petitions and remonstrances against it.

In some of the petitions on the table the accumulation of the public debt was imputed to the defect of the representation, and he was sorry to see such an absurdity in them. The accumulation of the public debt was the necessary consequence of the wars which we had been obliged to maintain in defence of our Constitution and our national independence; and he

for one had no scruple in declaring, that every war in which we had been engaged, from the Revolution to the American war, was both just and necessary. He would, therefore, acquit the House of all the debt contracted, except for the American war, and as much as might fairly be imputed to too remiss a superintendence of the expenditure of public money; for all the debt contracted to support the American war, after that war became unpopular, the House of Commons was undoubtedly answerable. It was not enough for preventing wars that we were disposed to cultivate peace, if our neighbours were not as peaceably disposed as ourselves. When, therefore, the petitioners talked of preventing wars by reforming the House of Commons, they forgot that the work would be but half done, unless they could give as good a Constitution to France as England would then be possessed of. But when he mentioned this, he raised no argument from it against the general prayer for a reform in the representation. A right honourable gentleman (Mr. Burke), on presenting his plan of conciliation with America in 1775, made a speech, in which the virtues and the efficacy of representation were displayed with a force and clearness unequalled. Were the people of Ireland uncivilised and unsubdued after a forcible possession of their country for ages, what was the remedy? Representation. — Were the Welch in perpetual contention among themselves, and hostility to Englishmen, what was the remedy? Representation. — Were the counties of Chester and Durham full of discontent and disorder, what was the remedy? Representation. — Representation was the universal panacea, the cure for every evil. When the English Constitution had once arisen in their sight, all was harmony, within and without —

———— Simul alba nautis
 Stella refulsit,
 Defluit faxis agitatus humor;
 Concidunt venti, fugiuntque nubes;
 Et minax (sive di voluere) ponto
 Unda recumbit.

Let gentlemen read this speech by day, and meditate on it by night; let them peruse it again and again, study it, imprint

it on their minds, impress it on their hearts ; they would there learn that representation was the sovereign remedy for every disorder, the infallible security against popular discontent ; let them learn this, and give to the people not the unreal mockery, but the efficient substance of representation.

He came next to consider the conduct of the House since the American war. When the India bill, which he had the honour to propose, was lost, was it because the bill was unpopular ? By no means. Whatever odium had been afterwards excited against it, the people had then expressed no disapprobation. The right honourable gentleman (Mr. Pitt) had no hand in its defeat ; for, ready and able as he was to speak against it, it passed the House of Commons by a great majority. By whom then was it thrown out ? Let the merit be given to those to whom it belonged—it was thrown out by certain Bedchamber Lords, acting under the direction of those who had access to advise the King. The dismissal of the Ministry followed the rejection of the bill, and the House of Commons adhered to the discarded Ministers. The right honourable gentleman would surely allow that the House, in order to execute its functions, ought to command respect. Did it command respect on that occasion ? Was it respected by the Crown, by the Peers, or by the People ? The advisers of the Crown disregarded its remonstrances ; the Peers came to resolutions censuring its proceedings ; and the People treated it not as their organ in the Constitution, and the guardian of their rights, but as a faction leagued to oppress them, with whom they had no common interest or common cause. Since that period the House had not only commanded respect, but praise, from those who were permitted to advise the Crown, not by opposition, but by prompt obedience ; not by a watchful and jealous guardianship of the interests of the People, but by implicit confidence in Ministers and pliant acquiescence in the measures of the Court. Thrice had that House of Commons, which he should never mention but with honour, resisted the influence of the Crown, and nothing then was talked of but a reform of Parliament. The House of Commons had been now for nine years a complaisant and confiding body, and the cry of reform from those who were formerly the loudest and most active was heard no more. Reform

was then the only thing that could save the Constitution: the very sound of reform was now pregnant with the most imminent and gigantic danger. When that House of Commons resisted the influence of the Court, they were told that they were not the representatives of the people, and that they were not so chosen as they ought to be. The people felt that the charge was true in part, and were easily induced to give credit to the whole. Had that House of Commons been chosen in a less objectionable manner, had the people considered them as their representatives, could they have been so contemptuously treated and so ignominiously dismissed as they were? No; the people would have seen that the cause of their representatives was the same with their own: they would have given them their confidence and their support. But, it was said, a House of Commons so chosen as to be a complete representative of the People, would be too powerful for the House of Lords, and even for the King: they would abolish the one, and dismiss the other. If the King and the House of Lords were unnecessary and useless branches of the Constitution, let them be dismissed and abolished; for the people were not made for them, but they for the people. If, on the contrary, the King and the House of Lords were felt and believed by the people, as he was confident they were, to be not only useful but essential parts of the Constitution, a House of Commons, freely chosen by, and speaking the sentiments of, the people, would cherish and protect both within the bounds which the Constitution had assigned them. In the Russian armament, what had been the mode of proceeding? The Minister thought proper to arm against Russia, and the House of Commons was called upon to vote the supplies. Were they allowed to inquire into the necessity of that armament, or to judge of its propriety? No; they were told that to Ministers it belonged to judge, and to them to confide; and on this implicit confidence they voted the sums demanded of them. In the mean time, the people shewed their disapprobation of a war with Russia; the Minister adopted their sentiments; called on the House of Commons to agree with him in this change of opinion, and the House acquiesced. He would neither allow the House of Commons to judge in the first instance, nor, through him, look for the opinion of the people in the second.

He was to collect the opinion of the people, and tell those who ought to be their representatives, and the organs of their sentiments, what that opinion was. The lesson thus held out to every man in the House was this—"If you look for honour or for power, you must take care to conciliate the advisers of the Crown by a ready subserviency to whatever they require. If you presume to counteract them, you may enjoy the consciousness of serving the public without hope or reward; but from power and situation, from all the fair objects of honourable ambition, you are for ever excluded."

Having thus shewn that the House of Commons, as now constituted, was neither adequate to the due discharge of its duties at present, nor afforded any security that it would be so in future, what remained for him to answer but general topics of declamation? He had sufficient confidence in the maxims he had early learned, and sufficient reverence for the authors from whom he learned them, to brave the ridicule now attempted to be thrown upon all who avowed opinions that till very lately had been received as the fundamental principles of liberty. He was ready to say with Locke, that government originated not only *for*, but *from* the people, and that the people were the legitimate sovereign in every community. If such writings as were now branded as subversive of all government had not been read and studied, would the Parliament of 1640 have done those great and glorious things, but for which we might have been now receiving the mandates of a despot, like Germans, or any other slaves. A noble Lord (Mornington) had discovered that Rousseau, in his Social Contract, had said a very extravagant thing. He was not very well qualified to judge, for he had found the beginning of the Social Contract so extravagant, that he could not read it through; but he believed it was one of the most extravagant of that author's works. He did not mean to say that the noble Lord had produced an extravagant saying from Rousseau as a novelty; but it was somewhat remarkable that an extravagant thing, from the most extravagant work of an extravagant foreign author, should be produced as an argument against a reform in the representation of the people of Great Britain. Reverence for antiquity was then appealed to, and gentlemen were asked if they would consent to alter that which in former times had

been productive of such important acquisitions of liberty. With equal propriety our ancestors might have been asked if they would alter that Constitution under which so great an acquisition to liberty as Magna Charta had been obtained ; and yet, after the acquisition of Magna Charta, the condition of this country had been such as was rather to be execrated and detested, than cherished and admired. When gentlemen talked of the danger of rash innovation, and the great advantages of temperate and slow reform, they might find all they had to say anticipated in a much more pleasant treatise than any of their speeches, viz. the Tale of a Tub, where brother Jack's tearing off the lace points and embroidery from his coat, at the hazard of reducing the coat itself to tatters, and brother Martin's cautiously picking up stitch by stitch, exhibited an abstract of all their arguments on the subject. The septennial act, in the opinion of many, had been the means of preserving the House of Brunswick on the throne. But had such a House of Commons as the present been then in being, what would have become of the House of Brunswick and the Protestant succession ? " What ! " they would have said, " adopt so violent an innovation as septennial instead of triennial Parliaments ; do you mean to subvert the whole fabric of the Constitution ? Triennial Parliaments were sanctioned at the glorious epoch of the Revolution ; to triennial Parliaments we owe all the prosperity, all the glory of the reigns of King William and Queen Mary ; to triennial Parliaments are we indebted for the victory of Blenheim."—As rationally might they have said, that to triennial Parliaments they were indebted for the victory of Blenheim, as it might be now said, that to the right of Old Sarum to send Members to Parliament we were indebted for our annual exports being increased seven millions. If to such sources as these national prosperity was to be traced ; if for the essence of our Constitution we were to repair to a cottage on Salisbury Plain ; or, for the sake of antiquity more reverend, let us take Stonehenge for Old Sarum ; then might we undertake pilgrimages to the sacred shrine, and tell each admiring stranger, " Look not for the causes of our envied condition in the system of our government and laws ;

here resides the hallowed deposit of all the happiness we enjoy; but if you move one of these rugged stones from another, the British Constitution is thrown from its basis and levelled with the dust."—A right honourable friend of his [Mr. Windham was Chairman of the Downton Committee] had been lately employed for many weary days in examining the divisions of burgage tenures, to be found in a trench at Downton. Had it occurred to him, that in this trench he was searching for the most essential principles of the Constitution, the investigation would have been somewhat less irksome, the labour somewhat less fastidious.

The petition presented facts into which the House was bound to inquire, both in its legislative and its inquisitorial capacity. In the petition it was affirmed, that Peers nominated Members to seats in the House; and they had a standing order that no Peer should interfere in elections. In the petition it was asserted, that bribery and corruption were openly practised at elections; and they had a standing order against bribery and corruption. Let those facts be inquired into, or these idle denunciations be expunged from their Journals. A Select Committee had reported bribery against certain electors of Stockbridge; and a bill of pains and penalties, which had been founded on that report, had been rejected. He was not sorry for it: he wished not to see a poor man punished for selling his vote, while the sale of seats was connived at. The corruption of an individual voter was undoubtedly an evil, but small in comparison of the mischievous effects which the sale of seats must produce on the minds of the sellers and the buyers, while both of them knew that it was contrary to law. Let the House inquire and put a stop to such practices, or avow their expediency and repeal the laws that made them criminal.

The lateness of the hour, the clearness of the cause, and the danger of rejecting the motion, rendered it unnecessary for him to insist farther upon it. One word only with respect to the time. It was triumphantly said, by gentlemen on the other side, that ninety-nine out of every hundred of the people of England were well affected to the Constitution, and he believed that they were right. Where then was

the danger of inquiring into the defects of the Constitution with a view of correcting them? Could they hope for some golden period, in which the proportion of the ill-affected would be less than as one to ninety-nine? The objection to the time was therefore a fallacy, a mere pretext for putting off what the House could not help seeing to be necessary, but felt unwilling to begin. This manner of postponing, on the most frivolous pretences, what could not be denied to be fit, was more properly the object of ridicule than of argument: the time must come when the House would be unable to disguise, even from themselves, the necessity of inquiring into the state of the representation; and then too, perhaps, they might give room for a new application of the poet's raillery on an individual —

“ Let that be wrought which Mat doth say;
Yea, quoth the Erle, but not to-day.”

Mr. WINDHAM said a few words in explanation.

Several Members rose to speak, but the House calling loudly for the question, it was put, and the House divided;

For referring the petition to a Committee, 41

Against it, ————— 282

The House adjourned.

LIST of the MINORITY on Mr. GREY's Motion for a
REFORM in PARLIAMENT.

Right Hon. C. J. FOX
CHARLES GREY
M. A. TAYLOR
P. FRANCIS
J. WHARTON
Hon. T. ERSKINE
Lord R. SPENCER
R. H. Col. FITZPATRICK
T. THOMPSON
W. BAKER
J. C. CURWEN
D. NORTH
J. COURTENAY
Lord WYECOMBE
BENJAMIN VAUGHAN
J. R. BURCH
R. MILBANK
W. COLHOUN
CHARLES STURT
THOMAS C. WESTERN
J. B. CHURCH
JAMES MARTIN
W. SMITH

W. H. LAMBTON
JOSEPH JEYKYLL
Sir W. LEMON, Bart.
St. A. St. JOHN
W. LEE ANTOINE
W. C. SHAW
EDWARD BOUVERIE
GEORGE BYNG
Lord J. RUSSELL
CLEMENT TAYLOR
Sir. J. JERVIS, K. B.
Colonel MACLEOD
THOMAS WHITMORE
W. PLUMER
JOHN HARRISON
Sir H. FETHERSTON-
HAUGH
J. G. PHILIPPS
F. HONEYWOOD

Tellers.

R. B. SHERIDAN
S. WHITBREAD, Jun.

The following is an authentic Copy of the Petition, praying for a Reform in Parliament, presented to the House by Mr. Grey :

*To the Honourable the Commons of Great Britain, in
Parliament assembled;*

The humble Petition, &c. sheweth,

THAT, by the form and spirit of the British Constitution, the King is vested with the sole executive power.

That the House of Lords consists of Lords Spiritual and Temporal, deriving their titles and consequence either from the Crown, or from hereditary privileges.

That these two powers, if they acted without control, would form either a despotic monarchy, or a dangerous oligarchy.

That the wisdom of our ancestors hath contrived that these authorities may be rendered not only harmless, but beneficial, and be exercised for the security and happiness of the people.

That this security and happiness are to be looked for in the introduction of a third estate, distinct from, and a check upon, the other two branches of the Legislature; created by, representing, and responsible to, the people themselves.

That so much depending upon the preservation of this third estate, in such its constitutional purity and strength, your petitioners are reasonably jealous of whatever may appear to vitiate the one or to impair the other.

That at the present day the House of Commons does not fully and fairly represent the people of England, which, consistently with what your petitioners conceive to be the principles of the Constitution, they consider as a grievance, and therefore, with all becoming respect, lay their complaints before your honourable House.

That though the terms in which your petitioners state their grievance may be looked upon as strong, yet your honourable House is entreated to believe that no expression is made use of for the purpose of offence.

Your petitioners in affirming that your honourable House is not an adequate representation of the people of England, do but state a fact, which, if the word "representation" be accepted in its fair and obvious sense, they are ready to prove, and which they think detrimental to their interests, and contrary to the spirit of the Constitution.

How far this inadequate representation is prejudicial to their interests, your petitioners apprehend they may be allowed to decide for themselves; but how far it is contrary to the spirit of the Constitution, they refer to the consideration of your honourable House.

If your honourable House shall be pleased to determine that the people of England ought not to be fully represented, your petitioners pray that such your determination may be made known, to the end that the people may be apprized of their real situation; but if your honourable House shall conceive that the people are already fully represented, then your petitioners beg leave to call your attention to the following facts:

Your petitioners complain, that the number of representatives assigned to the different counties is grossly disproportioned to their comparative extent, population, and trade.

Your petitioners complain, that the elective franchise is so partially and unequally distributed, and is in so many instances committed to bodies of men of such very limited numbers, that the Majority of your honourable House is elected by less than fifteen thousand electors, which, even if the male adults in the kingdom be estimated at so low a number as three millions, is not more than the two hundredth part of the people to be represented.

Your petitioners complain, that the right of voting is regulated by no uniform or rational principle.

Your petitioners complain, that the exercise of the elective franchise is only renewed once in seven years.

Your petitioners thus distinctly state the subject matter of their complaints, that your honourable House may be convinced that they are acting from no spirit of general discontent, and that you may with the more ease be enabled to inquire into the facts, and to apply the remedy.

For the evidence in support of the first complaint, your petitioners refer to the return book of your honourable House—Is it fitting, that Rutland and Yorkshire should bear an equal rank in the scale of county representation; or can it be right, that Cornwall alone should, by its extravagant proportion of borough Members, outnumber not only the representatives of Yorkshire and Rutland together, but of Middlesex added to them? Or, if a distinction be taken between the landed and the trading interests, must it not appear monstrous that Cornwall and Wiltshire should send more borough Members to Parliament, than Yorkshire, Lancashire, Warwickshire, Middlesex, Worcester-shire, and Somersetshire united? and that the total representation of all Scotland should but exceed by one

Member, the number returned for a single county in England?

The second complaint of your petitioners, is founded on the unequal proportions in which the elective franchise is distributed, and in support of it,

They affirm, that seventy of your honourable Members are returned by thirty-five places, where the right of voting is vested in burgage and other tenures of a similar description, and in which it would be to trifle with the patience of your honourable House, to mention any number of voters whatever, the elections at the places alluded to being notoriously a mere matter of form. And this your petitioners are ready to prove.

They affirm, that in addition to the seventy honourable Members so chosen, ninety more of your honourable Members are elected by forty-six places, in none of which the number of voters exceeds fifty. And this your petitioners are ready to prove.

They affirm, that in addition to the hundred and sixty so elected, thirty-seven more of your honourable Members are elected by nineteen places, in none of which the number of voters exceeds one hundred. And this your petitioners are ready to prove.

They affirm, that in addition to the hundred and ninety-seven honourable Members so chosen, fifty-two more are returned to serve in Parliament by twenty-six places, in none of which the number of voters exceeds two hundred. And this your petitioners are ready to prove.

They affirm, that in addition to the two hundred and forty-nine so elected, twenty more are returned to serve in Parliament for counties in Scotland, by less than one hundred electors each, and ten for counties in Scotland by less than two hundred and fifty each. And this your petitioners are ready to prove, even admitting the validity of fictitious votes.

They affirm, that in addition to the two hundred and seventy-nine so elected, thirteen districts of burghs of Scotland, not containing one hundred voters each, and two districts of burghs, not containing one hundred and twenty-five each, return fifteen more honourable Members. And this your petitioners are ready to prove.

And in this manner, according to the present state of the representation, two hundred and ninety-four of your honourable Members are chosen, and, being a majority of the entire House of Commons, are enabled to decide all questions in the name of the whole people of England and Scotland.

The third complaint of your petitioners is founded on the present complicated rights of voting. From the caprice

with which they have been varied, and the obscurity in which they have become involved by time and contradictory decisions, they are become a source of infinite confusion, litigation, and expence.

Your petitioners need not tender any evidence of the inconveniences which arise from this defect in the representation, because the proof is to be found in your Journals, and the minutes of the different Committees who have been appointed under the 10th and 11th of the King. Your honourable House is but too well acquainted with the tedious, intricate, and expensive scenes of litigation which have been brought before you, in attempting to settle the legal import of those numerous distinctions which perplex and confound the present rights of voting. How many months of your valuable time have been wasted in listening to the wrangling of lawyers upon the various species of burgagehold, leasehold, and freehold! How many Committees have been occupied in investigating the nature of scot and lot, potwallers, commonalty, populacy, resiant inhabitants, and inhabitants at large! What labour and research have been employed in endeavouring to ascertain the legal claims of borough-men, aldermen, port-men, select-men, burgessees, and council-men! And what confusion has arisen from the complicated operation of clashing charters, from freemen resident and non-resident, and from the different modes of obtaining the freedom of corporations by birth, by servitude, by marriage, by redemption, by election, and by purchase! On all these points it is, however, needless for your petitioners to enlarge, when your honourable House recollects the following facts; namely, that since the twenty-second of December, 1790, no less than twenty-one Committees have been employed in deciding upon litigated rights of voting. Of these, eight were occupied with the disputes of three boroughs, and there are petitions from four places yet remaining before your honourable House, waiting for a final decision to inform the electors what their rights really are.

But the complaint of your petitioners on the subject of the want of an uniform and equitable principle in regulating the right of voting, extends as well to the arbitrary manner in which some are excluded, as to the intricate qualifications by which others are admitted to the exercise of that privilege.

Religious opinions create an incapacity to vote. All Papists are excluded generally, and, by the operation of the Test Laws, Protestant Dissenters are deprived of a voice in the election of representatives in about thirty boroughs, where the right of voting is confined to corporate officers.

alone; a deprivation the more unjustifiable, because, though considered as unworthy to vote, they are deemed capable of being elected, and may be the representatives of the very places for which they are disqualified from being the electors.

A man possessed of one thousand pounds per annum, or any other sum, arising from copyhold, leasehold for ninety-nine years, trade, property in the public funds, or even freehold in the city of London, and many other cities and towns having peculiar jurisdictions, is not thereby entitled to vote. Here again a strange distinction is taken between electing and representing, as a copyhold is a sufficient qualification to sit in your honourable House.

A man paying taxes to any amount, how great soever, for his domestic establishment, does not thereby obtain a right to vote, unless his residence be in some borough where that right is vested in the inhabitants. This exception operates in sixty places, of which twenty eight do not contain three hundred voters each, and the number of householders in England and Wales (exclusive of Scotland,) who pay all taxes, is 714,911, and of householders who pay all taxes, but the House and window taxes, is 284,459, as appears by a return made to your honourable House in 1785; so that, even supposing the sixty places above mentioned to contain, one with another, one thousand voters in each, there will remain 939,370 householders who have no voice in the representation, unless they have obtained it by accident or by purchase. Neither their contributions to the public burdens, their peaceable demeanor as good subjects, nor their general respectability and merits as useful citizens, afford them, as the law now stands, the smallest pretensions to participate in the choice of those who, under the name of their representatives, may dispose of their fortunes and liberties.

In Scotland, the grievance arising from the nature of the rights of voting, has a different and still more intolerable operation. In that great and populous division of the kingdom, not only the great mass of the householders, but of the landholders also, are excluded from all participation in the choice of representatives. By the remains of the feudal system in the counties, the vote is severed from the land, and attached to what is called the superiority. In other words, it is taken from the substance, and transferred to the shadow, because, though each of these superiorities must, with very few exceptions, arise from lands of the present annual value of four hundred pounds sterling, yet it is not necessary that the lands should do more than give a name to the superiority, the possessor of which may retain the right

of voting notwithstanding he be divested of the property. And on the other hand, great landholders have the means afforded them by the same system, of adding to their influence, without expence to themselves, by communicating to their confidential friends the privilege of electing Members to serve in Parliament. The process by which this operation is performed is simple. He who wishes to increase the number of his dependent votes, surrenders his charter to the Crown; and, parcelling out his estate into as many lots of four hundred pounds per annum, as may be convenient, conveys them to such as he can confide in. To these, new charters are, upon application, granted by the Crown, so as to erect each of them into a superiority, which privilege once obtained, the land itself is reconveyed to the original grantor; and thus the representatives of the landed interest in Scotland may be chosen by those who have no real or beneficial interest in the land.

Such is the situation in which the counties of Scotland are placed. With respect to the burghs, every thing that bears even the semblance of popular choice, has long been done away. The election of Members to serve in Parliament is vested in the Magistrates and Town Councils, who, having by various innovations, constituted themselves into self-elected bodies, instead of Officers freely chosen by the inhabitants at large, have deprived the People of all participation in that privilege, the free exercise of which affords the only security they can possess for the protection of their liberties and property.

The fourth and last complaint of your petitioners is the length of the duration of Parliaments. Your honourable House knows, that by the ancient laws and statutes of this kingdom frequent Parliaments ought to be held; and that the sixth of William and Mary, c. 2. (since repealed) speaking while the spirit of the Revolution was yet warm, declared, that "frequent and new Parliaments tend very much to the happy union and good agreement between King and People;" and enacted, that no Parliament should last longer than three years. Your petitioners, without presuming to add to such an authority by any observations of their own, humbly pray that Parliaments may not be continued for seven years.

Your petitioners have thus laid before you the specific grounds of complaint, from which they conceive every evil in the representation to spring, and on which they think every abuse and inconvenience is founded.

What those abuses are, and how great that inconvenience is, it becomes your petitioners to state, as the best means of justifying their present application to your honourable House.

Your petitioners then affirm, that from the combined operation of the defects they have pointed out, arise those scenes of confusion, litigation, and expence which so disgrace the name, and that extensive system of private patronage which is so repugnant to the spirit of free representation.

Your petitioners intreat of your honourable House to consider the manner in which elections are conducted, and to reflect upon the extreme inconvenience to which electors are exposed, and the intolerable expence to which candidates are subjected.

Your honourable House knows that tumults, disorders, outrages, and perjury, are too often the dreadful attendants on contested elections as at this time carried on.

Your honourable House knows that polls are only taken in one fixed place for each county, city, and borough, whether the number of voters be ten or ten thousand, and whether they be resident or dispersed over England.

Your honourable House knows that polls, however few the electors, may by law be continued for fifteen days, and even then be subjected to a scrutiny.

Your honourable House knows that the management and conduct of polls is committed to returning officers, who, from the very nature of the proceedings, must be invested with extensive and discretionary powers, and who, it appears by every volume of your Journals, have but too often exercised those powers with the most gross partiality and the most scandalous corruption.

Of elections arranged with such little regard to the accommodation of the parties, acknowledged to require such a length of time to complete, and trusted to the superintendence of such suspicious agents, your petitioners might easily draw out a detail of the expence. But it is unnecessary. The fact is too notorious to require proof, that scarce an instance can be produced where a Member has obtained a disputed seat in Parliament at a less cost than from two to five thousand pounds; particular cases are not wanting where ten times these sums have been paid; but it is sufficient for your petitioners to affirm, and to be able to prove it if denied, that, such is the expence of a contested return, that he who should become a candidate with even greater funds than the law requires him to swear to as his qualification to sit in your honourable House, must either relinquish his pretensions on the appearance of an opposition, or so reduce his fortune in the contest, that he could not take his seat without perjury.

The revision of the original polls before the Committees of your honourable House, upon appeals from the decisions of the returning officers, affords a fresh source of vexation and expence to all parties. Your honourable House knows,

that the complicated rights of voting, and the shameful practices which disgrace election proceedings, have so loaded your table with petitions for judgement and redress, that one half of the usual duration of a Parliament has scarcely been sufficient to settle who is entitled to sit for the other half; and it was not till within the last two months that your honourable House had an opportunity of discovering, that the two gentlemen who sat and voted near three years as the representatives of the Borough of Stockbridge, had procured themselves to be elected by the most scandalous bribery, and that the two gentlemen, who sat and voted during as long a period for the Borough of Great Grimsby, had not been elected at all.

In truth, all the mischiefs of the present system of representation are ascertained by the difficulties which even the zeal and wisdom of your honourable House experiences in attending to the variety of complaints brought before you. Though your Committees sit five hours every day from the time of their appointment, they generally are unable to come to a decision in less than a fortnight, and very frequently are detained from thirty to forty days. The Westminster case in 1789, will even furnish your honourable House with an instance, where, after deliberating forty-five days, a Committee gravely resolved, that, "from an attentive consideration of the circumstances relating to the cause, a final decision of the business before them could not take place in the course of the session, and that not improbably the whole of the Parliament" (having at that time near two years longer to sit) "might be consumed in a tedious and expensive litigation;" and they recommended it to the petitioners to withdraw their petition, which, after a fruitless perseverance of above three months, they were actually obliged to submit to.

Your petitioners will only upon this subject further add, that the expence to each of the parties, who have been either plaintiff or defendant in petitions tried before your honourable House in the present session, has, upon an average, amounted to above one hundred pounds per day; and that the Attornies' bills, in one cause, the trial of which in point of form only lasted two days, and in point of fact only six hours, amounted to very near twelve hundred pounds. And this your petitioners are ready to prove.

Your petitioners must now beg leave to call the attention of your honourable House to the greatest evil produced by these defects in the representation of which they complain, namely, the extent of private Parliamentary patronage; an abuse which obviously tends to exclude the great mass of the people from any substantial influence in the election of

the House of Commons, and which, in its progress, threatens to usurp the sovereignty of the country, to the equal danger of the King, of the Lords, and of the Commons.

The patronage of which your petitioners complain, is of two kinds: That which arises from the unequal distribution of the elective franchise, and the peculiar rights of voting by which certain places return Members to serve in Parliaments; and that which arises from the expence attending contested elections, and the consequent degree of power acquired by wealth.

By these two means, a weight of parliamentary influence has been obtained by certain individuals, forbidden by the spirit of the laws, and in its consequences most dangerous to the liberties of the people of Great Britain.

The operation of the first species of patronage is direct, and subject to positive proof. *Eighty-four* individuals do by their own immediate authority send *one hundred and fifty-seven* of your honourable Members to Parliament. And this your petitioners are ready, if the fact be disputed, to prove, and to name the Members and the Patrons.

The second species of patronage cannot be shewn with equal accuracy, though it is felt with equal force.

Your petitioners are convinced, that, in addition to the *one hundred and fifty-seven* honourable Members above mentioned, *one hundred and fifty* more, making in the whole *three hundred and seven*, are returned to your honourable House, not by the collected voice of those whom they appear to represent, but by the recommendation of seventy powerful individuals, added to the *eighty-four* before mentioned, and making the total number of patrons altogether only *one hundred and fifty-four*, who return a decided majority of your honourable House.

If your honourable House will accept as evidence the common report and general belief of the counties, cities, and boroughs, which return the Members alluded to, your petitioners are ready to name them, and to prove the fact; or if the Members in question can be made parties to the inquiry, your petitioners will name them, and be governed by the testimony which they themselves shall publicly give.—But if neither of these proofs be thought consistent with the proceedings of your honourable House, then your petitioners can only assert their belief of the fact, which they hereby do in the most solemn manner, and on the most deliberate conviction.

Your petitioners entreat your honourable House to believe, that in complaining of this species of influence, it is not their intention or desire to decry or to condemn that just and natural attachment which they, who are enabled by their for-

tune, and inclined by their disposition, to apply great means to honourable and benevolent ends, will always insure to themselves. What your petitioners complain of is, that property, whether well or ill employed, has equal power; that the present system of representation gives to it a degree of weight which renders it independent of character; enables it to excite fear as well as procure respect, and confines the choice of electors within the ranks of opulence; because, though it cannot make riches the sole object of their affection and confidence, it can and does throw obstacles, almost insurmountable, in the way of every man who is not rich, and thereby secures to a select few the capability of becoming candidates themselves, or supporting the pretensions of others. Of this your petitioners complain loudly, because they conceive it to be highly unjust, that, while the language of the law requires from a Candidate no greater estate, as a qualification, than a few hundred pounds per annum, the operation of the law should disqualify every man whose rental is not extended to thousands; and that, at the same time that the Legislature appears to give the Electors a choice from amongst those who possess a moderate and independent competence, it should virtually compel them to chuse from amongst those who themselves abound in wealth, or are supported by the wealth of others.

Your petitioners are the more alarmed at the progress of private patronage, because it is rapidly leading to consequences which menace the very existence of the Constitution.

At the commencement of every session of Parliament, your honourable House acting up to the laudable jealousy of your predecessors, and speaking the pure, constitutional language of a British House of Commons, resolve, as appears by your journals, "That no Peer of this realm hath any right to give his vote in the Election of any Member to serve in Parliament;" and also, "That it is a high infringement upon the liberties and privileges of the Commons of Great Britain, for any Lord of Parliament, or any Lord Lieutenant of any county, to concern themselves in the Elections of Members to serve for the Commons in Parliament."

Your petitioners inform your honourable House, and are ready to prove it at your bar, that they have the most reasonable grounds to suspect that no less than *one hundred and fifty* of your honourable Members owe their elections entirely to the interference of Peers; and your petitioners are prepared to shew by legal evidence, that forty Peers, in defiance of your resolutions, have possessed themselves of so many burgage tenures, and obtained such an absolute and uncontrolled command in very many small boroughs in the king-

dom, as to be enabled by their own positive authority to return *eighty-one* of your honourable Members.

Your petitioners will, however, urge this grievance of the interference of Peers in elections no farther, because they are satisfied that it is unnecessary. Numbers of your honourable Members must individually have known the fact, but collectively your honourable House has undoubtedly been a stranger to it. It is now brought before you by those who tender evidence of the truth of what they assert, and they conceive it would be improper in them to ask that by petition, which must be looked for as the certain result of your own honourable attachment to your own liberties and privileges.

Your petitioners have thus laid before your honourable House, what the mischiefs are which arise from the present state of the representation, and what they conceive to be the grounds of those mischiefs, and therefore pray to have removed.

They now humbly beg leave to offer their reasons, why they are anxious that some remedy should be immediately applied.

Your petitioners trust they may be allowed to state, because they are ready to prove, that seats in your honourable House are sought for at a most extravagant and increasing rate of expence.

What can have so much augmented the ambition to sit in your honourable House, your petitioners do not presume actually to have discovered; but the means taken by Candidates to obtain, and by Electors to bestow, that honour, evidently appear to have been increasing in a progressive degree of fraud and corruption. Your petitioners are induced to make this assertion, by the Legislature having found it necessary, during the last and present reigns, so much to swell the Statute Book with laws for the prevention of those offences.

As far as conjecture can lead your petitioners, they must suppose, that the increased National debt, and the consequent increase of influence, are the causes of the increased eagerness of individuals to become Members of the House of Commons, and of their indifference as to the means used to gratify their speculations. To prove that they do not state this wantonly, or without substantial grounds, they humbly beg to call your attention to the following table, all the vouchers for which are to be found in the journals of your honourable House, or in different acts of Parliament.

At the Revolution	The Public Revenue did not exceed	£. 2,100,000	The Peace Establish- ment had not ex- ceeded	£. 1,900,000	The number of Statutes found necessary to preserve the freedom and indepen- dence of Parliament, to re- gulate Elections, and to prevent frauds, bribery, &c. amounted only to	14
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At the death of William III.	The Public Revenue had increased to a- bout	3,950,000	The Peace Establish- ment had increased about	1,950,000	The number of Statutes found necessary to preserve the freedom of Parliament, to prevent bribery, &c. in- creased to	26
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At the death of Queen Anne.	The Public Revenue had increased to a- bout	6,000,000	The Peace Establish- ment had increased to about	2,000,000	The number of Statutes found necessary to preserve the freedom of Parliament, to prevent bribery, &c. in- creased to	35
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At the death of George I.	{ The Public Revenue had increased to a- bout - - - }	{ 6,800,000 }	{ The Peace Establish- ment had increased to about - - - }	{ 2,600,000 }	{ The number of Statutes found necessary to preserve the freedom of Parliament, to prevent bribery, &c. in- creased to - - - }	37
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C At the death of George II.	{ The Public Revenue had increased to a- bout - - - }	{ 8,600,000 }	{ The Peace Establish- ment had increased to about - - - }	{ 2,800,000 }	{ The number of Statutes found necessary to preserve the freedom of Parliament, to prevent bribery, &c. in- creased to - - - }	49
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In the 31st year of the reign of his present Majesty	{ The Public Revenue had increased to a- bove - - - }	{ 16,000,000 }	{ The Peace Establish- ment had increased to above - - - }	{ 5,000,000 }	{ The number of Statutes found necessary to preserve the freedom of Parliament, to prevent bribery, &c. in- creased to - - - }	65
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It is upon this evidence of the increase of taxes, establishments, and influence, and the increase of laws found necessary to repel the increasing attacks upon the purity and freedom of elections, that your petitioners conceive it high time to inquire into the premises.

Your petitioners are confident that in what they have stated, they are supported by the evidence of facts, and they trust that, in conveying those facts to your honourable House, they have not been betrayed into the language of reproach, or disrespect. Anxious to preserve in its purity a Constitution they love and admire, they have thought it their duty to lay before you, not general speculations deduced from theoretical opinions, but positive truths, susceptible of direct proof; and if in the performance of this task, they have been obliged to call your attention to assertions which you have not been accustomed to hear, and which they lament that they are compelled to make, they intreat the indulgence of your honourable House.

Your petitioners will only further trespass upon your time, while they recapitulate the objects of their prayer, which are,

That your honourable House will be pleased to take such measures, as to your wisdom may seem meet, to remove the evils arising from the unequal manner in which the different parts of the kingdom are admitted to participate in the representation.

To correct the partial distribution of the elective franchise, which commits the choice of representatives to select bodies of men of such limited numbers as renders them an easy prey to the artful, or a ready purchase to the wealthy.

To regulate the right of voting upon an uniform and equitable principle.

And finally, to shorten the duration of Parliaments, and by removing the causes of that confusion, litigation, and expence, with which they are at this day conducted, to render frequent and new elections, what our ancestors at the revolution asserted them to be, the means of a happy union and good agreement between the King and People.

And your Petitioners shall ever pray.